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By GEOFF ST. REYNARD



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*All Stories Complete*

**MISTRESS OF THE DJINN** (Novel—38,000) ..... by Geoff St. Reynard ..... 8

Illustrated by Harry Sharp

Godwin of England led his Crusade across the Holy Land—into a land of evil and magic ...

**LONG BEER — SHORT HORN** (Short—3,250) ..... by Meek Reynolds ..... 76

Illustrated by Harry Sharp

It was just an ordinary drinking horn—except that once filled, it could never be emptied!

**I TAKE THIS EARTHMAN** (Short—7,300) ..... by Charles V. De Vat ..... 84

Illustrated by Julian S. Krupa

What possible weapon can you use against an alien race that has never known fear?

**THE DREAMING TREES** (Short—3,800) ..... by John W. Jakes ..... 98

Illustrated by James B. Settles

The trees were an obstacle to progress on the planet—but destroying them would be murder!

**ONE WAY . . .** (Short—6,000) ..... by Gilbert Grant ..... 108

Illustrated by Harry Sharp

He had stolen a quarter of a million and was running away—a lot further than he knew!

Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones illustrating  
a scene from "Mistress of the Djinn".

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# The Editor's Notebook

## A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

**W**EVE BEEN keeping you informed on the expansion of science and fantasy fiction during the past few months. This month we're able to go a step further and give you a report on one phase of the field. We mentioned a few issues back that Hollywood was coming out with some new stf films. We had an opportunity to see the first of these a few days ago, "Rocketship X-M".

**F**IRST OF all we must admit that we were prejudiced against Hollywood when we walked into the theater. We felt that inevitably they would not treat science fiction with the mature viewpoint it deserved. We expected to see something along the lines of a "Buck Rogers" serial. We're happy to say that we didn't.

**H**OLLYWOOD HAS done a creditable job in most part in making this interplanetary picture. The story, briefly, deals with a first trip to the moon which through technical misadventures eventually winds up on Mars. The Martian civilization is shown as having destroyed itself through a terrible atom war and the people have become mutations reverting back to the Stone Age. There is some action there while two of the crew of five are killed, and the other three make it to the rocket to return to Earth with their startling discoveries. Misfortune rides with them however, and their fuel supply runs out before they can land on Earth and they crash instead. The parting thought however is a happier one, in that man has finally conquered space and will build more space ships at once.

**I**T WAS QUITE apparent that not a great deal of money was spent in the making of this film. The sets were limited and some of the technical setups could have been greatly improved. To be critical we will say that just a few major faults lay on the technical side. When the rocket reached Mars the film was shown not black and white, but in a harsh lavender-red tone. We felt that the transition was too abrupt. More realism would have been given the situation if the film would have shown the crew preparing to leave the rocket, opening an airlock (or door) and a sudden rosy glow sweeping into the rocket—thus preparing the audi-

ence for the color of Mars' atmosphere. As it was, we saw the rocket land, and the next scene switched abruptly from black and white to red, showing the crew walking from the rocket.

**P**ERHAPS THIS is being hypercritical, but we don't think so. It is one of the small things that will add realism and dramatic impact to future science fiction films. We know that stf is a comparatively new medium for Hollywood, and there are a lot of things the film makers don't understand about the subject that we as followers of science fiction take for granted. But these things will correct themselves as long as the film industry is willing to take stf seriously.

**S**O FROM where we're sitting the prospect of science fiction films looks quite promising. The only things we'd like to see Hollywood do are: spend a little more money for better sets, thereby increasing the authentic note—and pay stricter attention to technical details such as the one we outlined. This could easily be done by calling in a competent science fiction adviser. (No, we're not soliciting for the job, just making a sound suggestion.)

**T**HE ACTING, for the most part, was adequate. We did think however, that too much stress was put on the "let's-save-the-Earth-from-a-similar-fate" theme. This should have been a story of "pioneering" much the same as the conventional western shows the frontier crashing of our early western settlers. There shouldn't have been too obvious a moral to be gleaned from the Martian plight as a result of atomic warfare. It should, and could, have been subtly handed to the audience. One does not expect a group of scientists conquering space for the first time to think more of troubles left behind on Earth than of the thrilling experience of being the first men to land on another planet.

**B**UT THESE are minor flaws. The film was good. You will want to see it. And we're sure you'll agree with us that at long last the field is getting national recognition. It's a big step forward for science fiction. But it's only the first one. The best are still to come.....WLH

# SOLAR GUARDIAN?

★ By CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT ★

“YOU’LL TAKE the first flight, Mishakoff,” the Communist colonel said, straightening the tunic of his baggy cotton uniform. His tongue, accustomed to the smoothness of Korean found difficulty with the Slavic sibilants. He wasn’t particularly fond of this help, but his men had to have air cover. And the Slavs could provide that with that deadly fleet of Ilyushin jet fighters standing outside in their drab war paint. Aye! That would be a sight to see! The American bombers and strafers would melt like butter before the Soviet air-fighters!

The colonel brought himself with difficulty to the present.

“Intelligence has informed us that the Americans are putting sixty B-29’s over Seoul in three hours. They have learned of our tank park. They think they’ll surprise us. Ah!” He smacked his lips. “They will learn, eh, Mishakoff?”

The Soviet Captain, veteran of a hundred aerial battles shrugged.

“It will be slaughter,” he said calmly, lighting a long *papruska*. He let the smoke drift from his nostrils. “There is no sense wasting jet fuel, colonel,” he said. “I wish my group to be overhead no more than a half hour before the scheduled attack.”

“Quite sensible, Captain,” the Asiatic replied. “My orderly will ring you in your quarters.”

Three quarters of an hour later, Mishakoff was summoned to the small staff room.

“Litvinov,” he called to his adjutant. “Put the pilots on ready!”

“Well, Mishakoff,” Colonel Lee Hui said, “they are on their way. The radar spotter reports fifty-eight B-29’s! What a target they will make for your aircraft.”

The Colonel could hardly refrain from rubbing his hands with glee.

Ten minutes later a hundred and twenty Ilyushin jet-fighters were air-borne. Captain Mishakoff had ordered strict radio silence to assure the surprise. The stupid Americans hadn’t the slightest suspicion that such a large number of attack jets were behind the Red Koreans. Just wait! The Captain glanced at his watch. Another ten minutes!

Signalling with his wing-tip lights, Mishakoff rose for more altitude and like a host of evil birds the horde of jets followed. That was it! Plenty of altitude—and then come swooping down on the unsuspecting Americans like hawks on a bunch of chickens. Even as the simile occurred to him, Mishakoff thought of the hawking days on Uncle Boris’ estate in the Caucasus. He touched the firing stud

of his stick and the strangely silent, smooth-purring aircraft bucked slightly as a brief test burst vanished into the night sky.

Then he saw them! Far over the right and far beneath the vast armada of unaware American bombers was silhouetted against the light reflecting surface of the ground.

Once more Mishakoff wiggled his wings and flicked the wingtip lights. The hundred and twenty Ilyushins swung in a wide silent arc toward the unprepared bombers.

Captain Mishakoff pushed the stick gently forward. As the acceleration began he thought again for some unaccountable reason, of hawking. The jets nosed forward as one!

And then out of the bleakness and the black of night, a strange roaring sound smote Mishakoff’s ears. It rose above the roar of the diving jets like a weird banshee wail. Mishakoff turned his head. He strained to see. And then he saw the incredible sight.

Knifing straight into the Soviet formation of diving jets with tremendous speed, was a host of odd-shaped craft. Looking for all the world like silvery flattened spheres, the odd aircraft ripped through the Soviets like hurled buzz-saws—and with the same effect.

His heart in his mouth, Mishakoff saw his sleek formation disintegrate into shattered shards of metal. The strange saucer-like craft seemed impervious to harm.

Mishakoff groaned and in mingled rage and frustration opened fire. He saw the ten tracer streams converge on one of the gleaming circular vessels. And nothing happened. Slashing to and fro the strangers made a complete destruction job of the Soviet jets. Metal literally rained from the sky.

Mishakoff cursed, first softly and then violently. With a sob of despair he swung the stick to the side and gave the jet full left rudder. But it was too late. In frightened panic, Mishakoff gave his ship the gun. The Flying Saucer overtook him with ease and the ship disintegrated around him...

The American bomber formation flew on undisturbed and unaware of its peril a moment before...

And back at base, a radar officer looked puzzled. He scratched his head. “Damn it, Jack,” he said to the radio technician at his side, “The ‘scopes are acting up again. Get rid of those snowy pips or the next thing you know somebody’ll be reporting flying saucers or beer bottles...”

Ramizail raised her arms in a gesture of command and the djinn knelt before her as the giant leader offered her his sword...



# MISTRESS of the DJINN

By Geoff St. Reynard

When the Third Crusade smashed into  
the Holy Land, the real enemy was not the  
Infidel, but the weird magic of the djinn

*He created man of clay like that  
of the potter;  
And He created the djinn of pure  
fire.*

—The Koran: The Merciful

## CHAPTER I

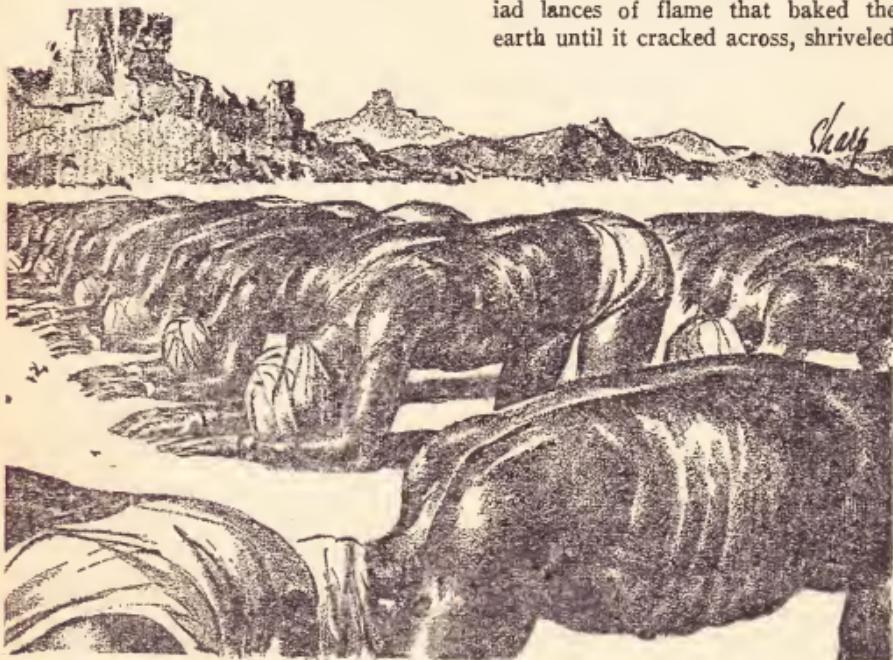
*Reeling on that day the heaven  
shall reel,*

*And stirring shall the mountains  
stir  
On that day shall they be thrust  
with thrusting to the fire of Hell  
What! is this magic, then?*

—The Koran: The Mountain

SEPTEMBER was hot, evilly hot, that year in the Holy Land.

The sun, a great sentient enemy of fiery brass, hurled down a myriad lances of flame that baked the earth until it cracked across, shriveled



the sycamore trees, and darted through men's skins to bubble and boil the blood in their veins as if it were so much red wine being mulled with white-hot pokers. The mountain streams, which had dwindled to a series of shallow pools in July, now gave up the ghost entirely and became parched gutters of mud as hard as the rocks they ran between. Only the deepest wells yielded water, and that more often than not tasted warm and brackish. The slightest breeze touched the flesh with the scorching torridity of the Egyptian khamsin.

The Turks and Bedouins in their tents lolled out their tongues, dabbed their lips with cloth soaked in lotions, and called on Allah for relief, for a little precious rain. The French and English Crusaders swore in hoarse voices that God was gone from the land, and they would all die before they saw Jerusalem. It was September, in the year of grace 1191.

And out on a red limestone hill overlooking a plain of shimmering, heat-racked barrenness, Godwin of England lay on his belly clad in full chain armor; his head encased in a great cylinder of steel, the close-fitting hauberk covering every inch of his body, and sweat running in rivulets from each pore.

Beside him lay a second man, also in full panoply of grand hauberk and vizored helmet.

The sun hammered down at them, turning the suits of metal armor into hellish instruments of torment.

Godwin of England pushed up his vizor—it was a new one and moved easily—to tap his nose with one gloved finger, so that the sweat which had been collecting on the handsomely prominent nose flew off in a fine spray. "Dick," he said, puffing a little, "it's a warm day."

The other man dropped his head on the hard earth of the hill and gave a

loud sarcastic groan.

"And this sweat," went on Godwin, "it tickles like a pack of fleas in my beard. Blast such a country! September ought to be cool."

"The Greek fire and blazing sulphur can't be any hotter than this ring-mail, I don't give a damn what they say," grunted Dick. "If we had any sense we'd wear Saracen robes and turbans."

"Like the Frankish *colts*, eh?" said Godwin scornfully. "Catch the King of England dressing like those soft, effeminate, gone-native, wishy-washy leftovers of the early Crusades! Ha!" he bit off a short bark of a laugh. "Armor's the proper garb for a gentleman, and don't you forget it, young Dick. No compromise with comfort or luxury!"

"Oh, I know, I know.... When will it rain?"

"Morvren the sorcerer says not for three weeks."

"I shall be warped and wizened to a twig by then," moaned Dick, who was a brawny, pleasantly homely warrior of some fifteen stone weight, standing six feet two in his steel shoes. "You'll be able to carry me in your scabbard, for all my juice'll be baked out by the infernal sun."

"I never heard you complain about anything before today, Dick," said England's King. "What's wrong? Are you sick?"

"Sick of loitering around waiting unfruitfully for Saracens, Godwin. Sick of sitting quiet in this furnace. Do you know when we had our last fight?"

"Three days since."

"A lousy skirmish! I mean a fight. The seventh of September, that's when we battled last!" He wriggled impatiently in his heavy armor, as though he felt that a brawl would cool him off.

"The seventh. And today's the fourteenth. You're right," said Godwin seriously. "It's been a week. Grip my vitals! When I came on this Crusade I expected some real fighting!" He tapped his nose again. "Well, if that spy was right, we'll see a troop of Turks debouching out of that defile this afternoon, and have a little sport before supper. Ah, thou!" he exclaimed suddenly. A great peregrine falcon had swooped down and alighted on his wrist. "Thou," he said tenderly, "where hast thou been, dear cleaver of clouds?"

THE HAWK turned her head and stared unwinking into her master's eyes. She was a giant of a bird, with a notched, scarred beak and very battered plumage. She had never been hooded or jessed; Godwin had raised her from a downy chick, and there was a fierce affection between them. "Thou," said the King again. "Thou hast blood half-dried on the feathers. Yellow-eyes, thou hast slain since thy master. Would that I could fly!"

"There's a picture," said Dick, fiddling with his vizor. "Godwin of England cavorting overhead in chain mail, flapping his arms—"

"Look there," snapped Godwin, abruptly all business. "Is that or isn't it the gleam of a Turkish helmet?"

Dick squinted through the heat haze. "By my halidom, it is!"

"To horse, son," said Godwin cheerfully, bouncing up to his feet like a boy of ten. "Ride my shoulder, thou ferocious bird; there's work for the hands today." He prodded the falcon, which fluttered up to his shoulder with a disgruntled cry. Godwin ran across the barren hilltop, placed his hands on the crupper of his steed, and vaulted into the saddle without touching stirrup or rein. Dick was swift to follow him, and they turned their horses' heads and booted them

down the slope.

Across the baking plain rode a double file of Saracen warriors. They sat their light-boned coursers easily, with hands on hips and heads turned to talk with their comrades. Their faces were finely chiseled, some dark and hard and others paler with features more exquisite than a European's; their eyes were sharp, their hands well-bred with tapered fingers and perfectly kept nails. Headpieces of soft white cloth were topped by shining steel helmets. Meshed Persian armor clad their bodies, with cloaks or Arab *djelabies* over the steel for sun protection. Their weapons were varied: stout little bows, curved three-foot scimitars, iron horseman-hooks, long etched-bladed knives, small round shields, and here and there a battle-axe hanging from the pommel of a high, gaudily-draped saddle. There were twenty Saracens; at their head rode the leader, a tall gaunt man in gold-washed armor and a black Bedouin burnous, with a drummer beside him.

Down the hill to cut them off came Godwin of England on his enormous Spanish charger, a horse of such power and bulk and ferocity that he alone struck terror to the hearts of Godwin's enemies in battle. Behind him, though not far behind, galloped Dick, the companion of the King. Two thundered over the rock-hard plain to engage twenty. The odds were typical. Neither Englishman would have had them more favorable.

To the rings of the mail on Godwin's shoulder clung the talons of the giant falcon, Yellow-eyes. Her beak opened and she screamed a hawk's curse on the Saracen files.

Then the leader sighted them, and standing in his stirrups shouted a warning to his men. The lines turned and stood at gaze. Godwin drew his broadsword—it was not his heaviest

one, though it weighed fifty pounds—and waved it around his head in sweeping arcs. "God and the Holy Sepulcher!" he bawled out his war-cry. "Death to the Moslem!"

Dick joined his bull's roar to his master's. "A Godwin! Godwin, Godwin, a Godwin!"

As they pounded to the onset, the Saracen leader spoke one cool word. Instantly his archers sped a flight of arrows, following them with a second that left the bows even as the first curved in the air. The Englishmen caught them on their great kite-shaped shield, and Godwin laughed. This was the beginning of life! To hell with the heat and the inactivity!

Several of the Moslems twisted in their saddles. They had seen the Franks fight, ah, yes, they knew the incredible smashing drive of the infidel. They glanced at their leader, but all he said was "Meet them!" So the two lines began to trot forward, and the drummer rattled delicate hands up and down on a pair of tom-toms, and someone started the ululating chant of Islam: *Allah il-allahu! Allah akbar! Ul-ul-ul-ul-allah akbar!*

**GODWIN SLAPPED** down the vizor of his helmet. Yellow-eyes left his shoulder and circled watchfully above the plain. With a noise like an explosion in a smithy, the two met the twenty, and sheared and swore and hacked, and were through the ranks and turning to meet them again; and four Saracens had fallen from their ponies, their heads cloven, their arms lopped off, or their bodies divided at the waist.

"A Godwin!" yelled Dick happily, his voice rattling in his helmet and echoing in his armor all the way down to his toes. "At 'em, sire!"

Godwin, whooping with glee, engaged two of the Turks together. His right arm, a flawless engine of swift

destruction, swung the great broad-sword now right, now left. Parry with the big shield, then slash—two more rode cautiously in at him, and he felt the dull crash of blades on his armor. Some well-hurled missile clanged on his helm. He blinked through the slit in his vizor, and swept his weapon down in an overhand blow that cleaved a Saracen to the breast and made even the horse beneath his corpse stagger and flounder from its force.

Now a tall supercilious-looking foe-man leaned forward to catch the King with an iron horseman-hook, to drag him from the saddle. He reckoned without the Spanish horse, for the animals of the knights were taught to fight as splendidly as their masters; great yellow teeth clamped horribly on his forearm; he shrieked with pain, and Godwin's point flicked mercifully out and drank from his jugular vein. Blood spattered the King's armor in scarlet fountains as he hacked and smote from side to side, a skillful giant driving off angry flies. There was no opponent worthy of his serious consideration here, and he howled and laughed and bounced happily in the saddle as he went about his grisly work.

Somewhere in back of him Dick was slaying Saracens in his accustomed manner, roaring between breaths the name of his beloved King: "A Godwin, Godwin and England!"

Technically, the two young Crusaders were fighting for the glory of God, battling to win their way to Jerusalem and capture the Holy Sepulcher from the hands of the Moslems; but actually they had come to the East in search of loot, brawling, and much similar lusty action, which they were now enjoying right heartily...

Finding himself alone, Godwin

threw up his vizor and pirouetted his horse to seek out more enemies. He was just in time to see Dick haul a Saracen off his horse and, holding him by the neck with his left hand, smash in his helmet and his skull with the huge iron ball that formed the pommel of his sword. Dick was a bloody one, thought Godwin, shaking his head and grinning. Where were all those scoundrels who had been here but a moment before?

Dead they were, all but the black-burnoused leader and his fresh-faced young drummer, who were flying together across the plain toward the defile whence they had come. Godwin bawled, "Come along, Dick!" and wheeling his mount dug in the spurs so that the animal leaped out like a greyhound. Side by side they hammered after the Saracens.

"Coward!" shouted Godwin, in the Moslem's own language. "Stay and do battle, dog of a sweeper!" But the leader fled on.

The peregrine falcon came down to ride the King's shoulder again, her feathers ruffling in the wind of their passage. Godwin said, "Thou blood-thirsty young duckling!" and waved his sword cheerfully. Turning his head, he saw Dick on his charger bucketing along abreast of him: there was a clear course before them, not so much as a bush to bar the way; and the Saracen's pony, which was bleeding from a bad neck wound, had begun to falter and slow its pace. The drummer held in the frantic horse he rode, so that he should not outdistance his leader; he put up a narrow patrician hand and fiddled with his vividly-hued turban, as though ludicrously afraid for its safety in this flight from doom.

Like twin engines of death rolling down a hillside to smash all before them, the Crusaders went rocketing to the kill.

THE SARACEN glanced back over his shoulder. He was so close that Godwin could see that the eyes in the gaunt fanatical face were slate-gray under bushy black brows. Then disaster struck.

As though their forelegs had been simultaneously caught by a noose, the two great horses stumbled and fell sprawling. Momentum of the headlong rush hurled Godwin and Dick over their saddlebows, and like ungainly projectiles from a ballista the King of England and the Baron Richard of Gascony shot twenty feet through the air and lit on their faces, ploughing up little ridges of the baked ground with their helmets as they slid to a halt.

The Saracen and his young drummer galloped on and disappeared into the gut of the valley.

Godwin rolled over on his back, sat up slowly, took off his gloves of mail, wrestled with his cylindrical helmet, got it loose, plucked it off, hurled it passionately at his quivering horse, touched his nose gently, found it and his forehead raw and skinned, put his hands on his mailed knees, and gave vent to an incredibly lengthy and involved string of purple oaths.

Dick turned his head where he lay, painfully pushed open his vizor, and as Godwin came to the end of his breath and his curses, took up where his master had left off and added a few choice adjectives of his own.

Then they looked at each other and began to laugh.

"If you ever say a word of this to anyone, Dick, I'll carve my name on your gizzard, I promise you!"

"I looked as ridiculous as you, I'll be sworn...wasn't I painting a portrait in words half an hour since, of you flapping your arms and flying through the air? A puissant prophecy!"

"God *damn*," said Godwin, climbing to his feet. "What a cropper! Ouch! Here, you beast," he growled at his horse, that was skittishly backing and filling, "stand quiet. Let me see those legs." He bent and held one foreleg, then the other. "Dick," he said, truly sober for the first time that day, "Look here a minute."

His comrade put his head down beside the King's. They stared at the Spanish stallion's legs.

"That's the burn of a hempen rope, or I'm a blind idiot," said Dick.

"Hmm. That's what I'd have said too. Do you spy any rope on this plain?"

"Not so much as a thin leather thong."

"Catch your nag." Dick did so, and brought it over. There were oozing raw wounds on both forelegs. "Great God," said the King uncomfortably.

Dick muttered, "They stopped together, as though they'd hit a breast-high wall. 'Twas the mercy of our good angels that the poor beasts didn't snap all their limbs. And here's four burns on 'em, all at the same height from the ground—" he broke off, and glanced about him fearfully. "Godwin," he said, "no mortal barrier stopped us on this accursed plain."

The King of England crossed himself. "Let's go back to the place where they were halted. Mayhap there's a normal explanation."

"Of course," said Dick. But neither of them felt quite happy.

They quartered the ground between them, like two hounds at fault on the trail of a fox. The earth was torn where the horses had galloped against the invisible impediment, and Godwin went back and forth over the spot until the heat made his keen vision blur. He wiped his eyes with the back of a hand and stared down again. Then he knelt, picked up an infinitesimal something from the hard ground, and slow-

ly walked over to his henchman.

"This," he said, glaring at Dick as though he was half enraged and half terrified—which he was—"this miserable object is the only thing loose within five hundred yards. Look at it! Did *that* stop us, and save two Saracen lives?"

He held out between thumb and forefinger a single long strand of black hair, jet and fine and gleaming; a hair from the head of a woman.

Dick looked at it very thoughtfully. Then he put on his helmet and shut the vizor with a clang.

"I don't know how you feel," he said hollowly through the slitted opening, "but as for me, I'd give twenty thousand dinars to be home in England. Come on, sire! Camp's five long miles away. Let's get off this unholy plain!"

So without even looting the Moslem dead, they clambered onto the horses and pointed their noses toward the orchards of Jaffa, where a hundred thousand Crusaders awaited them. As they rode, King Godwin twirled the mysterious hair between his fingers, and Yellow-eyes, sitting on his wrist, made playful little jabs at it with her cruel curved beak.

## CHAPTER II

*Man truly is by creation hasty.*

—*The Koran: The Steps*

THE KING of England was singing in his bath. He did not bathe with great frequency—in brutal fact, he seldom washed anything more than his hands and face—but after the fiery hot day, the long ride, the battle, and the evidently supernatural but mortally bone-jarring fall he had taken, Godwin was enjoying the tepid waters of the pool (it had originally been a fishpond) in which he sprawled

at full length.

"With a hie down down a down ah," sang Godwin tunefully in his noble baritone, "and the lily-white maiden came to his bed, turaloo...."

The cedar gates which led out to the ancient lanes of Jaffa were closed and bolted against unseemly intrusion. The court around the pool was flagged in blue and white marble. Greek artists had decorated the pool's sides and bottom; in the center a curling bronze snake spewed water from the tip of his forked tongue, so that it splashed into the pool with a cool silvery sound. One of Godwin's servants had sprinkled spices and perfumes into the bath, and set down a tray of sugared fruits and oranges together with a flagon of cold honey mead at the edge, where the King could reach it conveniently. He chose a fig, and thrust it into his mouth, and went on with the song.

But presently it died away on his lips, and he said to Yellow-eyes, "Thou wise old bird, what dost thee make of that affair of the—the woman's hair, eh?"

The falcon blinked and clucked sleepily. Godwin sank back and let the water run up his chest to his beard, and he thought hard for some minutes; but gave it up then and simply lay quiet, existing in a mindless state, letting the aches wash away.

He was thirty-one. Sun and wind and rain had turned the flesh to ruddy leather on his cheekbones and forehead, and sharp blue eyes blazed out of this background like coals of cerulean fire. He wore his hair long and his beard short, and both were yellow as sun-touched corn. He was six feet four, muscled like a tiger; tremendous vigor was in his expression and in every line of his splendid body. He had been constructed by the Fates to be a fighting man, to spend his life with horse and sword and vio-

lence; and he had fulfilled his destiny. There was no finer swordsman in the world. Many of the Frankish champions could when fully armored stand up to twenty men in combat; Godwin could face thirty without a tremor. He could stage an attack, make and employ all the various kinds of siege engines, use a crossbow or spear or sledge hammer with equal devastation. He was rash, reckless, immodest, lion-brave, generous, and unconsciously irreverent, as were most of his knights. He was the perfect man of war, the finest flower of chivalry, and with it all he was just a little stupid.

How could he be otherwise? His life had been spent on horseback, in armor, wielding a weapon at one or another adversary. He could write—laboriously. He could read—if he had to. He spoke French and Arabic. He could play a shrewd game of chess. He knew war, and tournaments, and hawking, and the chase. No man living could oppose him with force and continue to live. Why should he not be stupid about some matters: such as women, and astrology, and laboring for daily pittances of food, and geography, and the hopes and terrors and aspirations of common, ignobly-born mankind?

He took another fig.

"Thou wicked old beauty," he drawled to his falcon. Only with the bird and his horse did Godwin ever use the affectionate "thou." "If thou could speak, I'll wager thee'd tell me what halted the chargers on that infernal plain. Was it an angel, now, for some reason unwilling that I should take the Saracen's hateful life? Or was it one of their awful heathen spirits of the air, Yellow-eyes? They do say there are hundreds of them, and that King Solomon ruled them when he was alive...."

HE BROKE off as Dick entered from the dark recesses of the house, followed by Morvren the sorcerer and the fierce old Scottish knight, Lyulf of Graeme. The three strode across the court and made casual salutes to their master. There was little formality among these leaders of the Third Crusade.

"Dick has been telling us," said Lyulf straightway, "of your attack on the band of Moslems. It was ill done, Godwin. Two against a troop! Your loss would maim the Crusade and for lack of you we might never see the sacred city."

"There were only twenty of them," said Godwin, "and they were mounted on very little ponies. Dick could have done it alone."

Morvren interrupted, thrusting his lean head forward as was his habit when he spoke; like some nasty bird, thought the King, who's seen a particularly fat worm. "Godwin," he snarled, his dark eyes smoldering in the almost-handsome thin face, "have you still the hair, the magic hair which stopped your charge?"

Godwin tugged at his blond beard and shot a look of dire threat at Dick, who squirmed nervously. "I have," said he. "What—err, what did Dick say of it?"

"That it halted your horses with such abruptness that you would both have fallen, save for your excellent skill at riding."

"Ah," said Godwin, sinking back into the warm water. "Yes. Lesser horsemen might very well have gone a-flying over their nags' ears. There is the hair, Morvren. On Yellow-eyes' pedestal."

The Gaelic sorcerer snatched up the black hair, and the peregrine, waking from a doze, stabbed irritably at his hand. Morvren held it in the light of a multi-colored glass oil-lamp. He turned it this way and that. He pon-

dered, made signs, and said, "An ordinary hair. Fah! Not a taint of witchery about it. 'Twas some spell of the Saracens', I'll wager you, Godwin, having naught to do with this hair. Had I been there—"

"You'd have sailed out of your saddle," said Dick, and grim old Lyulf chuckled. "I've yet to see one of your incantations bring anything to pass except a dreadful stench, Morvren. Go kindle your bloody incense! There's war to be talked of."

Morvren turned and stalked out of the court without a word; and gnarled Lyulf said, "Watch him, Godwin. I like not the way he's always cornering with the dissatisfied French and eyeing the neutral Turks in the city. Yon's not a good man."

"He's amusing," said the King off-handedly. "Now! How shall we take Jerusalem, eh, lads?"

So they cast off their cares and began to talk warfare, and they were all three very contented. Out in the city a gaunt Saracen with slate-gray eyes slid round a corner, through wrought-iron gates, and into a low doorway, where a woman welcomed him with formal joy and took his black Bedouin burnous to fold and lay aside while they colluged together; but the Crusaders knew nothing of this, and made great swaggering plans over the golden honey mead.

### CHAPTER III

*The fair, the beauteous ones, with large dark eyeballs, Kept close in their pavilions: Whom man hath never touched, nor any djinn.*

—The Koran: The Merciful

THE MORNING was bright and terrible with sunlight. Godwin of England ambled contentedly through Jaffa's winding lanes, Dick at his el-

bow and Morvren two steps behind. It was not a day for work, not the weather to send them to the walls; which the soldiers of the Franks were laboriously rebuilding, so that Jaffa when they left it would be a fortress again. The sun blazed, and Godwin took his ease and strolled through the city. And at the iron-work gates of a tiny elegant house he halted, and stared, and his mouth fell open.

"God's mercy!" he gasped, clutching Dick's wrist. "Look at that wench, Dick! God's breath! Have you ever seen—has any woman before ever—"

"She's pretty enough," said Dick. "Not really bad looking, if that's what you mean."

"S'death!" said the King, pulling at his beard. "She—she—she—"

The sorcerer's head pushed between them. "Ah," he exclaimed, "as you would say, sire, if the cord of your tongue weren't slit, a very tasty bit indeed."

"Yes," said the King, now growing very red in the face, "but really, you know, more than that. Dick, Morvren, that's the most beautiful girl I have ever clapped eye on. What a pearl!"

The young woman looked up then. She was seated cross-legged in the Moslem fashion on a scarlet rug, her dark robes tucked in about her lithe and wondrous body; she wore a blue-gray veil, but it was spread loosely down her back and did not hamper the world's appreciative view of her face. Atop her head was a neatly-rolled turban of orange and red. About her neck hung a golden chain with a kind of sigil dangling between her full breasts; and on her right thumb shone a gigantic gold signet ring.

"I could span that waist with these hands," said Dick, gradually becoming interested—nothing ever intrigued him at once, for his brain worked slowly save in matters of war and

bloodshed—"with these two hands, I could, and there'd be a knuckle or two to spare. Perfect! Godwin, you have an eye, sire!"

Her complexion was smooth and fair; not so dark, indeed, as the Englishmen's. Her features were eminently satisfactory, and her eyes were deep liquid violet. She had full, humorous, rather sensual lips, which parted to show white even teeth when she smiled at the Crusaders. And her hair was a great wayward mass of black curls, black as the pit of Gehenna, black as a flameless brand, black as ebony.

"May you live a thousand years, Godwin, King of England," she said in his own language. Her voice was throaty and full of laughter. "And you, Baron Richard, may you live to see all your dreams come true."

The two men bowed. It was not the practice of Crusaders to show deference to the Saracen women, but before this beauty they were like two small bashful boys, ashamed of their bold speech; naturally they had assumed she knew no English. "God save you, lady," said Dick.

"Which God?" she murmured, and glanced over the King's shoulder at the lean wizard. "Morvren, sorcerer of London's evil byways," she said, touching the huge thumb ring lightly to the sigil on the chain. "Allah's curse on you, Morvren, for the treachery in your heart. May your straggly moustache twist into your nostrils and smother the life's breath. Well, Godwin," she continued brightly, after she had startled them all with the curse, "how goes the Crusade? Are you near to freeing Jerusalem from the dreadful Turks?"

Godwin sputtered, while Dick laughed at the sorcerer's astonished expression. She went on.

"You wonder how I can speak your language so flawlessly. My father

was a knight of noble blood, oh, very noble; he came a-crusading hereabouts some twenty years since, and saw my mother, who was a cousin of Saladin and traced her ancestry back to King Solomon. Father was handsome, Mother was lovely, and they produced this unworthy daughter—" she pointed one perfect finger at her bosom—" who speaks both tongues, and is forever torn 'twixt Islam and the Cross."

**E**NDING THE curious little speech, she put her arms around her knees, tilted back, and balanced there on the tip of her backbone, grinning impishly at them. Poor blushing Godwin stammered, "Then you're half English!"

"Which half I've never been able to decide. Would you like to guess?"

In came thrusting Morvren's half-handsome features. "This young slut mocks you, sire. Have her dragged to the gallows!"

She directed a look of pure hatred at him. "You'd take me if you weren't a coward, knowing I'd knife you for your lust," she hissed. Godwin noticed that even in anger her face was charming. "Morvren, you claim supernatural powers. I give you the lie. I say to your face you're a fumble-fingered fraud, a charlatan who makes his way by his petty juggler's tricks. Now blast me for that irreverence!" She snickered. "You couldn't harm a three-year child except by taking a broadsword to it. Morvren, you're a false wizard. A treacherous, cowardly snake! Wipe the desire from those watery eyes. None but a champion of men may bed Ramizail!"

"Ramizail," repeated Godwin admiringly. "That's a ringing name."

She turned her head toward him, a small surprise showing in her violet eyes. "There is more to this great-thewed baby of a monarch than I'd

thought," she said, half to herself. "Why, sire, that was a delightful compliment. Ramizail thanks you. May the djinn guard your sleep!"

"Djinn?"

"Spirits of the air, those beings whom Solomon chained, jugged, jarred, and kept in abeyance. Potent gentry, Godwin!" She laughed, rising from her rug like a sleepy cat awakening, with easy sinuous motion. She was very tall, lacking perhaps two inches of six feet. "We'll meet again, Godwin of England. Now the ninety-nine names of Allah protect thee!" She went into the court of her tiny house, and the wrought-iron gates swung shut behind her.

"By the sapphired halls of Hell!" said the King. "What a *woman!*"

"How did those gates close?" rumbled Morvren, tugging at his moustache. "She never touched them."

And Dick said, "Did you notice her hair, Godwin? Black...black as the strand we found on the heat-racked plain."

## CHAPTER IV

*And they who believed not shall say, "O our Lord! Show us those of the djinn and men who led us astray."*

—*The Koran: The Made Plain*

**G**OD AND the Holy Sepulcher! Death to the Moslem!" bellowed the King, as he rampaged up a hillside in advance of fifty knights and twice a hundred mounted men-at-arms. Nothing save the chance of a fight could have drawn him from Jaffa that blistering afternoon; but when his spies had whispered of a roving band of Saracens in the neighborhood of the hill of El Hattab, he had leaped for his sword and helmet on the instant.

Now that gang of Saracens—a great *harka*, composed of perhaps five hundred Bedouins, Turcomans (the mercenary soldiers of the country), yellow-tunicked Mamelukes, Turks and assorted Eastern nationalities—was flying before him, obviously afraid to stand and do battle; even as he watched, the last of them topped the rise and vanished.

"Caitiff rogues!" bawled somebody just to the King's left, and Godwin took time to grin. That would be John of Bartesme, known affectionately as Dirty John. Off to the right Dick was shouting his "Godwin, a Godwin!" In the rear the other knights raised their usual hubbub. Score upon score of iron weapons clanked on steel armor, horses whinnied with excitement, and the heat slashed and beat at them unmercifully, till they were wellnigh suffocated in their helmets.

Godwin's great Spanish charger labored up the last few steep yards of the hill, and the King caught his first sight of the top.

There was a tree in the center, a shade tree with its leaves all curled and drooping. Beneath it sat the girl Ramizail, leaning intently over some small objects on the rug before her.

There was not another soul within miles.

Godwin galloped across to her, reining in his steed. He halted ten yards off. Dick stopped beside him, with Dirty John and Lyulf the Scot. The other knights bunched up behind, slamming their horses to dead halts, bumping painfully into the ones before them; several men-at-arms fell off their nags in the press and were trampled. Everybody began to shout "What is it?" and similar inane questions, while the half of Godwin's crew which could not top the hill because of the crowd in front went milling and cursing from side to side. It was a terrible huddle.

"Dear Godwin," said Ramizail, looking up at him innocently. "You followed me out from Jaffa. And in this heat! You *are* a gallant lad."

"Woman," said old Lyulf sternly, "where are all the Saracens?"

"Great goodness," said she, "I'm sure it would take me hours to tell you. Let's see. Saladin is in his tent, eating olives. His brother Saphadin is asleep beside—well, never mind whom. The leader of the mercenary Turcomans is practicing swordplay with two of his captains. He is a very bad fencer. The Lord of—"

"Those men we were chasing," said Dick, removing his helmet. "Where did they go? Damn it, what black sorcery is this?"

"You talk in riddles," she answered. "What men? No one came this way." She giggled a little. "Perhaps you haven't learned to distinguish mirages from reality?"

"There were five hundred Saracens," said Godwin firmly. "They carried the banner of the Crescent Moon, and I distinctly saw amongst them the lean dog who ran from our swords but yesterday. Ramizail, not even the daughter of an old Crusader is immune from my wrath if she lies to me."

"I lie? Oh, Godwin," said she, "this is not noble of you, sire."

"Damn," said the King miserably, climbing slowly out of his saddle. "I can see for miles, and Dick, there are plainly no Saracens hereabouts. What the devil were we chasing?"

"Djinns," said Dick, "and Caitiff rogues," grumbled Dirty John. Behind them the half-a-hundred knights clanked restlessly in their chain mail. Godwin of England went over and stood accusingly before the girl.

"Madam," he said through his vizor, "you are playing with me, and I am not sure that I like it."

SHE BENT her gaze to the objects on the rug at her neatly-shod feet. "I think you do like it," she murmured absently. "Black jack on red ten... Yes, Godwin dear, I believe you enjoy it. You're a sweet boy."

"This to the King!" gasped Lyulf. Dick chuckled.

"Red queen on black jack," said Ramizail, moving one of the objects.

"What are they?" asked Godwin, intrigued despite himself.

"What, these? Playing cards."

"Playing cards?"

"They aren't invented yet," said the girl. "Black king on red queen. It's coming out."

"Good Lord, wench," roared Lyulf, "what witchery have you brewed us? Where did those villains disappear, eh? Some cave? Some cleft that's hidden from our sight?"

"There were no men," said she. "Red ace on black king. There! It's finished. Oh, you great clumsy half-blind English! You're always galloping headlong after some fancy of your own. Why don't you go home and leave us in peace? We never harmed you at all."

"The Holy Sepulcher must be liberated," said Godwin uncertainly.

"Silly young lemon-bearded King. Take off your steel mask and sit down, I'll read your fortune in the cards." She was as blithe and undismayed as though some hundreds of her mortal enemies were not raising Cain all about her. She lifted her lovely face and smiled at Godwin. "Do sit down before you get apoplexy," she said.

Godwin unlaced his helmet, took it off, peeled down the metal gloves, pushed his broadsword around to the side and squatted at the edge of her rug.

"Do you see this?" she asked, holding up a card. "That's an ace. Ace of spades." She cocked her head

and appeared to listen to something that was inaudible to the others. She nodded. "Oh, yes. They call it Blue Pete."

"This is fantastic," roared Lyulf.

"Be silent, old wolf," said Godwin impatiently. "The Saracens are gone, aren't they? Why fret over 'em? Take the men back to Jaffa. Dick and I will follow presently. The child interests me with her queer toys."

"What, leave you here, sire, at the mercy of this witch-woman?"

"Witch-woman be cursed. She's only a harmless girl. 'Twas a mirage we followed, one of those eye-tricking images painted on the desert air by the heat and dust, I suppose, of this foul country... Go home!"

SO LYULF and the knights turned about and cantered angrily away, followed by the men-at-arms, and the three were left alone on the hilltop. Godwin said, "Well, Ramizail, go on."

"Shall I riddle your fortune from the cards, King of England? I can do it."

"Do, then. First tell me straight, what are they?" He took one and fingered it suspiciously. "It's not parchment, nor yet your odd thin paper of the East. It bends, but springs back—"

"Don't fold it, you bear-pawed ox!" she cried.

Dick said, in imitation of Lyulf's rough voice, "This to the King!"

Godwin handed it back to her with a grumbled apology.

"Men play a game—many games—with these, in a far country; or it may be, in a far time. I don't quite know where the—where my friends got them, but I'm pretty certain they aren't invented yet. Some day I'll teach you a game with them."

"Ah," said Godwin wisely. "A game. Like chess, or tables, or the



"Shall I riddle your fortune from the cards, King of England?" she asked.

*jeu des dames?"*

"Well, something like those. See, I put them together. Now I shuffle them." She flicked her fingers expertly, and the cards fanned through the air. "I lay them down, and begin to draw them one by one. Aha!" Her face lit up. "Here's the king of hearts on top. That's you, Godwin dear."

"King of hearts," said Dick. "Ho ho! His Majesty Godwin the First, the monarch of the ladies' fluttering hearts!"

"Be silent, sirrah," snapped Godwin, who was enthralled by the little thin toys.

"And here..." she caught her breath, and a faint rosy flush crept up over her cheeks. "Here," she went on, "is the queen of hearts. That's my card. So close to yours, Godwin! Sure it means something."

"It means we're sitting across a rug from each other, I suppose."

"And here's the ace of spades again. Trouble, sire, trouble and death and incredible fighting that hovers on the rim of the future for you."

"That's not trouble," said Godwin of England, grinning. "That's a man's life!"

"Here is the jack of spades. Morvren, your vile sorcerer! Oh, Godwin," said she, looking up at him soberly, "why will you travel in company with a Judas?"

"What do you know of Judas, you heathen wench?"

"I'm half a Frankish woman. You forget. I am not stupid, either, as you are to bare your back to the sorcerer's treacherous knife."

"Morvren's all right," said the King. "He amuses me with his prophecies. None of which, by the way, come true. He's a jester, and when I'm weary of my minstrels and their gititers, and my jugglers and praisers, and the rest of the servile lot, then I call in Morvren to make me laugh."

"You'll learn the dangerous way that he's a jealous reptile with a fang in his mouth.... Here's a four. What that means I've forgotten. Never mind, that's enough. You and I are to be bound together in some fashion, perhaps to share an adventure together; Morvren will be about, and trouble will follow him as a camel follows the man with the sack of grain. And the ace of spades..." her fine eyes clouded over, and she shivered. "Death for someone, Godwin. Battle and death."

"Death for your kinsmen who hold the Holy Sepulcher, for I'm sworn to take it from 'em, my dear." He called her pet names automatically; for he was falling in love with her, and almost knew it, but not quite consciously. "By my crown, Rami-zail, you can twist the pattern of the future from those things as I can read luck in the red wetness of a Turk's gore on my stout blade."

**S**HE FLARED up at that. "Godwin, will you remember that I am half Moslem? Such callous remarks!"

"Half Moslem and half Christian, eh, besides half Saracen and half English?" asked Dick. For answer she leaned back against the tree bole and began to sing a crooning, haunting song to them.

*"Flinging down the bloody sword  
And laying off his suit of mail  
My father took the Moslem  
maid..."*

*"Half an Arab, half a Gael,  
Torn 'twixt Islam and the Cross,  
I crave your Christ, but take  
the veil."*

"Gut me, it's as pretty as a Moorish love tune," said the King. "You must sing it to my minstrel, young Blondel de Nesle. He's a swift tongue for a rhyme like that."

"I'll sing it to no one save you, Godwin; and to Dick here, for he's but an extension of your own personality, a sort of miniature Godwin. His beard is red, and yours is gold. There's little other difference."

"We are close," said the King, throwing an arm over his friend's shoulders. "But Dick's no miniature of anyone. He's just great Dick."

"The girl is right, sire," said Dick. "I'm your right arm, and Lyulf's your left. We three have done much together, but it's you who are the true body of our comradeship; without you the arms would perish."

Godwin hit him affectionately in the stomach. Since there was chain mail between fist and belly, the King shook his hand and remarked "Ouch!" Then said Ramizail, "How long will you tarry in Jaffa? Till the rains make the air bearable, perhaps, for your pampered soldiery to ride through toward Jerusalem?"

"Till we've rebuilt Jaffa into a fortress to cover our backs, young woman; and no longer, come rain or snow or even more sun. Heigh ho!" He rose, tugging on the metal gloves. "Home, Dick. I've a craving for cool wines and light fingers on my brow."

"Your wife," said Ramizail disdainfully. "Berengaria, princess of Navarre. Your tallow-faced spouse of some four months. Go to her, Godwin of the poor taste."

An expression of acute distress crossed the King's ruddy face at mention of his wife. "Well, Ramizail," he said, "to tell the truth, that 'light fingers' remark was only to annoy you, for I can see you're wild with passion for me, and little wonder, after a lifetime of seeing no one but Turkish cowards and effeminate Syrian Franks." She gave a loud shriek of laughter, which he ignored. "To tell the truth," he said again, and stopped.

"Yes?" she prompted spitefully.

"To tell the truth, Ramizail, my wife doesn't understand me."

And with that he hauled his armor-weighted frame up into the ornamented saddle, and trotted slowly off down the hill, with Baron Richard at his charger's heels. Ramizail watched them until they were two tiny shining specks in the distance. Then she began to laugh; but the mirth died out on her scarlet lips, as she wondered if perhaps his egotistic assumption of her swift-growing love might be no more than the truth.

"Oh, blast the man!" she said furiously.

## CHAPTER V

*And Pharaoh said: "Fetch me every skilled magician."*

*—The Koran: Jonah, Peace Be On Him.*

**G**ODWIN lay in his fishpond bath drinking honey mead to keep cool, but he did not sing. He gazed at Yellow-eyes, the peregrine falcon, and he said softly, "Thou cunning bird, seek me out the author of that spell which I pursued today, and I will tip thy feathers with purest white gold, and give thee choicest mice to eat till thy belly bloats like a bag full of sesame seed. Only lead me to him, Yellow-eyes, and I will...."

"What if it were Ramizail?" said Dick, who was also immersed in the water. The heat of early evening was more oppressive, if possible, than that of the afternoon. "Would you do anything drastic to her?"

"Ramizail? That handsome little bluff," said the King scornfully.

"I begin to wonder about the adder-tongued female," remarked his friend thoughtfully. "Doesn't it strike you, sire, that she knows a great deal more than she ought?"

"How so, son?"

"She called us all by name the first time we met her. She knew you were coming out to that hill—I'm sure she did. She even knew of your wife, name and all; and the lady Berengaria hasn't been much in evidence since we took Jaffa."

"Say it plain, Dick."

"She might be a spy for Saladin himself."

"She might be," agreed Godwin light-heartedly. "She might also be a young fraud, her and her playing cards and mystifications."

"Well, we should at least confine her. She goes running around the country at her own vagrant caprice."

"Ah, she's harmless. Here comes Lyulf to grumble over something, I see it in his face. Well, old wolf, what have I done now?"

Lyulf came into the flagged court. "Nothing but expose yourself carelessly, in a rash and reckless manner, with none but Dick to help you if danger threatened. Godwin, the walls rise apace, and within five weeks we will be turning our horses' noses toward the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. A brief five weeks! So promise me you'll rest in Jaffa, and not go running around the countryside in this heat, searching for brawls. I worry over you, truly I do, sire. You *are* the Crusade."

"Yes, yes, old wolf. I'll be good. Hand me the raisins, Dick. If one of their *harkas* is sighted nearby, though, Lyulf, all your old-woman's yammering won't keep me in this reeking city."

"It's the troop we chased today that's in my thoughts. If one can vanish, and be as though it had never been, then another can do likewise; and another might lead you into a trap. These Eastern magics—I dislike them."

"Let's have Morvren in to amuse

us with a faulty prediction," drawled the King. "My mind wants occupying."

"No one's seen the sorcerer all day. He's disappeared."

"Then call the jugglers. First the croaking old Scotch crow to warn us of dire dooms, and then the jugglers to calm our shattered nerves," said the King. Dick laughed, and Lyulf looked from one to the other with cynical patience.

"Oh, very well. Have your joke, you two. Call me a croaking old crow. I was fighting barons and champions twenty years before you peeped over the sides of your cradles, yet you treat my gray hairs as lightly as a kitten regards a ball of wool. You'll grow up one day, I suppose, unless a Saracen arrow spits you first. Ho, there! Send in the jugglers!"

THEY CAME into the court, men in particolored costumes with ridiculous tags and flaps and baubles hung about them; they danced, and did hand-stands, and wrestled, and kept four balls in the air at the same time; while Godwin lay in his bath staring moodily at Yellow-eyes, the hawk, and thinking first of the elusive Saracen phantoms and then of Ramizail. At last he dismissed the fools, roused himself from the tepid water, and allowed his servants to dry him and dress him in silver-worked samite over light mesh armor. Then he put on his second-best crown, a circlet of gold with upraised crosses and fleurs-de-lis, tipped it back on his head, and went swaggering out into the streets of Jaffa to seek excitement.

"Good evening, Godwin dear," said Ramizail. He caught himself and staggered back a few paces. He had almost stepped on her there in the shadowy corner.

"Ramizail! You're always underfoot these days....I was just

thinking of you."

"I know," she said placidly. "You were thinking that I'm beautiful, and that Berengaria doesn't understand you."

"Well," said Godwin, "well, yes, I suppose, now that you mention it, I was."

"You're going to be abducted tonight, Godwin dear, if you don't take precautions."

"What! By whom?" he cried, grinning. There was some subtle aura about this child that always made him want to smile, some air of innocent deviltry. "Who'd try to kidnap the King, eh?"

"Why, Morvren, of course. Who else is base enough? He wants to sell you to Saladin. He's been intriguing with Turcoman spies." She frowned—delightfully, thought Godwin. "If I were you, I'd go back into your house. Or else call up Dick and a file of your men. I can't do this business of soothsaying very well, but I see trouble just twenty steps ahead."

"Ramizail, it's time you were abed," he said loftily, and because she had irked him with this unasked-for advice, he sauntered forward into the gloom of evening.

Precisely twenty steps later, something hit him on the head with a loud crack, and the world swam and faded and vanished before his face.

## CHAPTER VI

*I betake me for refuge to the  
Lord of the daybreak  
Against the mischiefs of his  
creation;  
And against the mischief of the  
night when it overtaketh me;  
And against the mischief of weird  
women;  
And against the mischief of the  
envier when he enviyeth.*

—*The Koran: The Daybreak*

**G**ODWIN of England opened his eyes. Not wide, certainly, for he did not care to show his enemies that he was awake until he had looked over the situation; he merely let a slit appear between the lids, through which his gaze roamed back and forth.

He was on the back of a camel, his ankles tied with a rope beneath its belly, his hands fastened to the high curved saddlebow. The tip of his spine must have been hammered halfway up his back, he thought. It was black night, with no moon; and the sooty dark was as hot as the staring, blazing day. A file of camels stretched out over the rolling dune-hills before him. Behind he could hear the pad, pad of others, and the grunt and bubble of their eternal complaints. None of the riders were talking. They were wrapped in burnouses and cloaks, and seemed to be veiled likewise.

Godwin opened his eyes wide. In the starlight, meager as it was, no one would notice if he were still unconscious or not.

They were in a desert land, and proceeding in a straight line over the sand toward some unknown destination.

Godwin tested his bonds cautiously. He thought he could break them with one mighty jerk, but there was obviously no use in doing so at the moment, for he was surrounded and had no idea of his location in the country. He relished for a time the picture of himself, standing bound and apparently helpless before the leader of his captors, then suddenly snapping his ropes contemptuously and leaping at the villain's throat....

"Aha, the villain! Who's he?" thought Godwin.

Why, Morvren, naturally.

Everyone had said Morvren was a treacherous snake, and Ramizail had

even said....

Come to think of it, how had that saucy little minx known he would be thus humbled, slugged and abducted?

There was more to Ramizail than full lips and flashing violet eyes and playing cards!

He thought about Ramizail, and was rather happy for a while. Then he pondered on Morvren. He imagined Morvren on the rack, Morvren with a thumb-screw on every finger, Morvren writhing under a twelve-tailed lash, Morvren hanging up by his ears. It made him even happier than did thinking of Ramizail. He was an elemental, primal kind of man, was Godwin of England.

It did not occur to him to doubt that the scoundrel behind this affair was Morvren. Too many times had old Lyulf grumbled about the sorcerer. And there was also young Ramizail's prophecy.

The caravan of silent riders dipped down into a valley between dunes, and halted before three large black tents. They beat the camels to their knees with low cries of "*Oosher, baba, oosher!*" and two of them came to Godwin and removed the rope from his ankles. Unlooping his wrist bonds from the pommel, they pushed him roughly toward the central tent. He grinned to himself and walked through the shifting, hot sand until he stood at its closed entrance.

A dark hand pulled aside the curtaining flap, and Godwin stepped within. A man lounged on a backless couch, nibbling Chinese ginger. He was robed in blue-rose silken clothes from Antioch, booted with red Cordovan leather, and a damascened steel blade hung from his girdle. He sported the green turban of a Hadji. Beneath it, slate-gray eyes lanced at Godwin from a thin, fanatical face.

"I begin to feel we're old friends," said the King grimly.

THE OTHER rose from his divan. He was slightly-built, almost delicate in his hands and feet, but he seemed about to burst into white-hot flame, so much energy radiated from his slim old body. He extended his hand to Godwin.

"I am the Lord Mohammed El Sareuk," he said. "Believe me, King Godwin, I regret the violence necessary to bring you to my humble —by the very God!" he exclaimed, breaking off his formal speech. "The fools have left you bound! Forgive me!" He drew his curved knife to cut the ropes. Godwin emitted a short bark of laughter and flexing his arms gave a quick tug. The ropes frayed out and parted with a snap. El Sareuk gasped involuntarily.

"Name of all camels!"

"They were probably old ropes," said Godwin. He sniffed the air, which was heavy with the scent of cardamons, aloes, and spices. "I'm hungry," said he.

"Slaves are bringing refreshments. You will sit beside me?" The King walked across the tent and plumped down on the couch, as insolently as he could. El Sareuk hid a smile. "We will eat," he said, "and then we will talk. Only say you forgive me for this unwarranted seizure of your royal person?"

"Aren't you afraid I'll break you in half?" asked Godwin suspiciously.

"There are men hidden throughout the tent, sir. Behind that brocaded hanging stands the strongest Mameluke in the East. You would die... most painfully, if you attempted it. But such precautions are unnecessary between two gentlemen. Does the lion of England stoop to strike like the serpent? Ah, no."

"Well, I suppose not," said Godwin doubtfully.

Food came in: *couscous* of lamb stuffed with raisins, almonds, and

shredded dates; a strange confection, unnamed, of nuts and rice and other matters; lemon juice in glass vessels from Tyre; olives and oranges; white bread, eggs, *asida* flavored (or tainted) with mouth-blasting red pepper; icy sherbets foaming from goblets of gold; and cakes of that incredible delicacy of the East, hard sweet white sugar.

Godwin ate enormously, polished off every dish as it was set down before him, and finished the final crumb with a reverberating belch.

"Thank you," said the Hadji. "And now, if you will pardon my unseemly haste, we'll get to business."

"Good," grunted the King, wiping his beard with a yard of expensive gauze that happened to be lying nearby.

"Yesterday your false wizard Morvren slunk out to me with a proposal."

"Aha!" said Godwin fiercely. "Morvren!"

"He has hated you, it seems, a long while; and is very envious of you. He was to betray you into the hands of my men, and I was to sell you to Saladin, on whom be peace! I accepted his plan, for I saw great need of you, King Godwin." He paused, and chuckled. "It was the very day on which you had slain my troop and almost killed me. Disarmed, and unprotected in my light armor against your terrible sword, I was forced to fly ingloriously from the field, with you in hot pursuit. You may remember?"

"I remember. Black sorcery intervened."

"Ramizail is skilled in the arts, which her djinn have taught her."

"Ramizail?" repeated Godwin, a blood-curdling suspicion forming in his brain.

"Certainly. She was the drummer

'boy' who rode beside me. When it seemed you would catch us, she plucked a hair and threw it in your path; and two of her djinn picked up the ends and tripped your steeds with it."

"By the grail! Dick said her hair was the same color as that we found .... So 'twas she who spilled us in the dust! I remember the gesture she made toward her turban. The gorgeous, wicked young devil!"

El Sareuk smiled thinly. "Not wicked, only mischievous. I wished her to have you slain, but she said it would be a pity to set djinn upon such a warrior; so I allowed her to use the hair trick." He cocked an ear to the tent entrance. "By Osman ibn Affar! If that is not Ramizail's own voice raised in unseemly altercation, then I have not known and loved it these nineteen years!"

Godwin looked at him. El Sareuk was elderly, but full of vigor and passion; easily might an Eastern girl take such a man for her lover. Godwin felt sick. True, he was married himself; but it had been a political union, Berengaria did not understand him, and he felt little affection for her. He could not keep from dreaming of the cream-skinned, deep-eyed half-caste witch. So the Saracen had loved her for nineteen years? That was Ramizail's age precisely. El Sareuk must have admired her as a babe in arms. Probably reared her himself, the dog, training her to love him in return. Bah!

## CHAPTER VII

*And unto Solomon did we subject the wind, which traveled in the morning a month's journey, and a month's journey in the evening. And we made a fountain of molten brass to flow for him. And of the djinn were some*

*who worked in his presence, by the will of his Lord; and such of them as swerved from our bidding will we cause to taste the torment of the flame.*

—*The Koran: Saba*

THE TENT curtain flew gustily inward, and a small black-haired whirlwind entered with an angry screech. She picked up a vase and hurled it at El Sareuk's head, tore off her turban and threw it down to stamp upon it with shrill curses in Arabic. "Mohammed," she stormed, "how dared you allow those vile ragtag of the desert to carry off dear Godwin? Oh," she said, shaking her head till the wonderful black mane gusted out, "if it were not that you are the light of my world, Mohammed, I would have my djinn Harry you to Hell!"

"Why, my dearest Ramizail, are you in love with this mighty barbarian?" asked El Sareuk with a smile. Godwin glared at him fiercely. Was the man jesting, or was his hold on the child so powerful he could afford to brook rivals thus lightly?

"With him? Ha!" said Ramizail, rather too loudly to be really convincing. "I'd take El Hamar, the ugliest of my djinn, before I'd take him! Him and his damned egotism!"

"Well, really," said Godwin.

"Answer me," she continued, speaking to the Saracen leader. "How dared you have poor Godwin abducted so shamefully, after I'd ordered you to let him be?"

"My, my," murmured El Sareuk, "dear in one breath, egotistic in the next, and immediately upon them, poor! You cherish strange emotions for this Godwin of the Franks." He turned to the King. "Pray forgive me for talking thus before a guest. I am prone to forget myself with Ramizail.

Sit again, Godwin of England, and we shall continue with our business."

"Oh," said the girl, somewhat mollified, "you're talking business with him?"

"Nothing which you may not hear, pearl of my tents. Be pleased to have some sherbet and listen."

They all sat down on the broad divan, Ramizail in the middle. There was an unEasternly informality about El Sareuk and the girl which startled Godwin, used as he was to the strict privacy in which the women of the country dwelt. "What were we talking of when this slim ferocious tiger erupted in our midst?" asked the Hadji.

"Djinn...I say, but are there really such beings?" Godwin was intrigued with the thought.

She giggled. She seemed always to be giggling, and at Godwin, King of England, no less! Yet somehow he did not mind it. He would not have minded anything she said or did—when he looked at her, so close and beautiful and sweet-smelling, he scarcely minded even the thought that El Sareuk was her longtime lover. "Are there really djinn?" he asked again.

"Oh, heavens, yes," she said, as calmly as an English lady assuring her husband that there would be spiced hog's head for dinner. "The Koran itself speaks of them."

The Saracen took up an intricately-worked golden box, all bejeweled and ornamented, and withdrew from its perfumed depths a copy of the sacred book. "Here," said he, "let me read to you, sir, from the Sura called *Hedjr*: 'We created man of dried clay, of dark loam moulded; and the djinn had We before created of subtle fire.' There are many djinn of various ranks, which my people once worshipped before Mohammed the

Prophet—may Allah exalt his name!—taught them different ways. There are afreets, who are the evil djinn, over some of whom Ramizail has a certain amount of control, though not over others; and there are schedim, the demons, over whom no mortal has ever had power, not even Solomon."

"On whom be peace," chimed in the girl.

"Ah, yes," said Godwin, grinning. "I see. You control the djinn, young Ramizail. You are surely a great enchantress, greater than my dark-faced treacherous Morvren ever thought of being."

"Morvren," she said, and spat, which Godwin considered unladylike. "Ramizail, the descendant of Solomon through her mother's line, could squash Morvren on her thumbnail!"

"She could, truly," El Sareuk assured him.

"And these djinn," pursued the King, "they can do small miraculous feats, like tripping horses, and perhaps forming mirages which appear as armies?"

SHE SMILED up at him, very guilelessly. "I wanted to see you," she said, "and so I cast a spell with their aid. Phantoms rose from the earth to bring you to me."

"Ah...I could have you torn into small untidy fragments for that, Ramizail."

"By whom?" she asked. "Mohammed's slaves are all about you, pompous Englishman."

"My dear, my dear," chided El Sareuk. "Manners."

"But the djinn are more powerful than you'd think from those little tricks," she went on. "They can lift me above the world to see it and all its wonders; they can bring me things from anywhere, or from any *time*;

they can do almost anything I allow them to. They tell me things—that's how I knew of your abduction. If my powers were to fall into the hands of an unscrupulous person—" she shuddered, suddenly serious. "It would be dreadful," she said.

"You, of course, are not unscrupulous. You merely let them trip Kings and create mirages to force my people to gallop many fruitless miles under a sky of molten bronze."

"Watch how you mock me, Godwin of the heavy hand and leaden wit. I can break your puny Crusade like that." She snapped her fingers.

"Then why don't you, little bold witch?" He laughed. "Ramizail, you are a lovely, a flawlessly lovely wench. And you undoubtedly have some powers of sorcery, aided perhaps by these minor sprites you term djinn. I admit the trick with the hair was clever! And the phantom Saracens seemed real enough, even to a presentment of El Sareuk amongst 'em. But all this of descent from Solomon, and smashing Crusades, and future times—well, Ramizail, you must admit you're making it all up from whole cloth, now aren't you? Telling tales to create importance for yourself?"

Her violet eyes crackled like little open furnaces. "By the God, by the very God, by God!" she swore in Arabic. "I'll show you!" She raised her hand to his face, showing him the gold thumb ring. On its surface were indented two interlocking triangles in a circle. "Solomon's Seal, my blockhead! Now see!" She thrust the sigil on its chain at him. The same symbols were upon it, raised from rather than cut into the precious metal. "Now!" she said, and fitted the two together, till ring and sigil merged and became one. "I cry up Mihrjan! Appear in your proper form, Mihrjan!"

On the luxurious carpet before them stood a giant ten-foot black, turbanned and pantalooned with white silk and lustrous blue velvet. He salaamed deep. Godwin drew back instinctively, for the man had shot up through the ground!

"Do you admit the existence of the djinn?" Ramizail asked him. "Or shall I have Mihrjan carry you off to the lonely mountains of far Tibet and leave you to freeze in a snowbank?"

Godwin, taken aback as he had seldom been, blinked and nodded. "I admit there are djinn," he husked. If he were stupid in some thing, he was not imbecilic; and superstition was an integral part of his daily existence. Besides, when a giant shoots up from a carpet where nothing appeared the moment before, few men will deny the probability that there are supernatural forces involved. "Oh, indeed," said Godwin, "there do seem to be djinn, Ramizail dear; and this one looks remarkably able to do things."

"Leave us, Mihrjan," said El Sareuk. The djinni looked at his mistress, who shook her head irritably. "Yes, go, Mihrjan."

The djinni dwindled into the carpet and was gone, leaving a faint scent of attar in the air. Godwin said, "Ramizail...."

"With your permission," said the old Saracen, bending toward the King, "we must hasten our business matters, sir. I have allowed the child to pout and explain and produce her pets for a reason. It is necessary that you understand the nature of the djinn, for if we make our bargain, you will have certain dealings with them."

"Bargain," said Godwin vaguely. "Go on, El Sareuk. Go on."

### CHAPTER VIII

*When we said to the angels,  
"Prostrate yourselves before*

*Adam," they all prostrated them  
save Eblis, who was of the djinn,  
and revolted from his Lord's  
behest.... On the day whereon  
God shall gather them all together,  
"Oh race of djinn," will He  
say, "much did ye exact from  
mankind. Your abode the fire!  
therein abide ye for ever; unless  
as God shall will.*

—*The Koran: The Cave; Cattle*

**FIRST**, MUCH as it pains me to speak so to a guest who has eaten my salt, you will admit you are a prisoner here, and I hold your life in the hollow of my hand."

Godwin pulled at his beard. He eyed the weapon in El Sareuk's girdle. He could snatch that, finish off the Saracen lord, and with any sort of luck, beat off all the slaves and men-at-arms who were stationed behind those swinging drapes and hangings.... But there were Ramizail's djinn. He thought of the bulging chest muscles and biceps of the black lad who had popped up through the carpet. Suppose she called up two or three score? Even Godwin of England must be crushed beneath such foemen. And he was wearing very light mail, under the silver-worked samite.

He made a great effort, conquered his stubborn pride, and said, "Yes, you have me, El Sareuk."

The dark fanatic face twisted with very real pain. "This is distasteful, King Godwin, more distasteful than anything I have ever done. Understand me," he said, bending over Ramizail and laying his nervous hand lightly on the King's knee, "I have never been forced to do such a thing before. I shall make another pilgrimage to Mecca when all is done, to cleanse my honor of the stain. I have been a gentleman," he said, lowering his gaze to the floor. "By Allah, I have taken pride in it, and pride has



The djinn salaamed deeply as Godwin stared at his huge figure in amazement...

brought me to this detestable deed, for wondrous are the ways of the true God!"

Godwin shifted in embarrassment, and on an impulse grasped the Saracen's hand in his and shook it vigorously. "Look here, damn it," he said roughly, his ruddy face even more red than usual, "I see—I mean to say, you know, God smite it all, I can see you're all right, El Sareuk. I mean to say, if you had to kidnap me, well, you had your reasons." He took his hand back and gave a fearful tug at his short beard, almost pulling it out by the roots. "So don't apologize. It makes me uncomfortable. We be warriors, you and I."

The Hadji looked at him gratefully. "Thou art the better man," said he quietly. "What a Moslem you'd make!"

"Now we're all friends," said Ramizail cozily, "and you can talk your business and let him go, Mohammed."

"First," replied El Sareuk, "this." He clapped his hands; a slave appeared in the doorway; and the Hadji said, "Bring the King's weapons that were taken from him."

Godwin, buckling on his broadsword and knife, grunted with relief. Without them he felt naked.

"Now hear me, Godwin of England. When it was first bruited among my peoples that you had landed on our shores, at the camp of the Franks who were besieging Acre—may they all burn in the bosom of Eblis for a thousand years—except you, of course—when it was told in the tents and cities, I say, there was consternation among my folk; the word ran from man to man, and our throats worked and we could not speak. Saladin himself sprang from his couch and cried out in anguish, for 'twas said that the Holy City was all but in your hand at that moment."

Godwin fidgeted modestly.

"The King of England," went on El Sareuk, "was well known to be worth five hundred of our men in battle, and ten thousand of our men in statecraft and in the lore of the siege. So we took thought on how to turn you aside from your Crusade, sir; and no man could propose anything save the assassin's knife, or the strangler's cord. We did not know then that you carried with you a traitor, a serpent in man's skin, the false wizard Mervren."

"Just a minute," said Godwin. "If you mean you want me to go home and leave the Crusade, well, I can't do it. I may have to fight my way through a regiment of your wench's djinn, but by the talons of my falcon, I'll do it if needs must! While Saladin holds Jerusalem, I cannot cease. I cannot turn aside, El Sareuk."

"May Allah shorten my life by half if I meant anything of the kind! We'll vanquish you in fair fight, or not at all, for you are a man!" said the Saracen firmly. "No, Godwin, the favor I crave of you has nothing to do with the Crusade, nothing at all. It may be," he said. "that you will die in the doing of this deed. I hope not. By the beard of the Prophet, on whom be peace, I swear I hope you will not die! Rather than that would I see you sitting in the Temple of Solomon (*on whom be peace*, muttered Ramizail dutifully), and the streets of Jerusalem all hung with cloth of gold and flowers and silken banners for your conquering hordes, than see you dead, Godwin the mighty!"

"Thank you," said Godwin. "Go on."

"I shall tell you a brief tale. Have some more sherbet, Ramizail. Well, once on a time, many centuries, many eons before Solomon the Wise was born of woman, the afreets took thought and built themselves a for-

tress, deep in the hills of this pleasant land."

THE KING wiped the beaded sweat from his brow and grumbled "Pleasant land, indeed!" to himself.

"The fortress they called Dar el Baida, the White Castle, because it was black." He chuckled. "The afreets, being subtle demons, the worst of all Allah's created creatures, save the schedim, have the habit of misnaming anything they lay their tongues to, simply to annoy the godly. Does not the holy Koran tell us plain that we should not misname anything from Hell up to Paradise, nor even nickname anything? Alas, we are not all perfect in the commands of the Prophet! I myself have been guilty of calling my Ramizail 'Little Annoyance' when she played me skittish jests."

"Your little annoyance frets under this spate of words, words, words," said Ramizail. "Do get on with it, dear Mohammed."

"I am reproved. This Dar el Baida, great black fortress of the afreetish clans, stands in the hills scarce a third of a day's ride from this very spot, Godwin; where it has stood for nearly-ever, and the memory of man and djinn runneth not to the contrary. From it they come forth at odd times, when the humor seizes them, to work their evil: seducing women, overthrowing the righteous, battling with the well-intentioned-djinn, and in general—"

"Playing hell," suggested Godwin.

"Precisely. Now there is a prophecy, handed down from the days of Solomon—yes, yes, my dear, on whom be peace—there is a prophecy that one day Dar el Baida shall fall and be no more, and all the afreets who throng its baleful streets will be hurled to the everlasting flame. I forgot just

which of the seven Hells they're doomed to. Let me see, could it be the Raging Fire that Splits Everything? The Scorching Fire? The Blaze? The Abyss?"

"Never mind," quoth Ramizail impatiently. "Tell him about the prophecy. I see what you want him to do, old Mohammed El Sareuk; and I'm blessed if I like the notion."

"But he is the one!" cried the Saracen. "He is surely the veritable one, Ramizail!"

"Which one?" asked Godwin, taking the girl's glass and gulping a large draught of sherbet.

"Solomon did not learn of Dar el Baida until his days were numbered in tens. He sent some of his djinn to besiege it; but he died ere he could reinforce them, and it was about then that the prophecy, said to have come from his dying lips, began to be circulated. Know then, Godwin," said El Sareuk formally, "that there shall one day come a conquering lord from out of the Western lands beyond the many waters, who shall lay siege to Dar el Baida, and enter into its inviolate gates, and throw down the rule of the afreets therein; and Dar el Baida shall crumble and fall into the dust of eternity!" His gray eyes blazed. "The conqueror, men say, will be a young man, red-faced and stalwart, having thews like a lion in his prime, and wearing upon his face a beard of startling pure yellow, aye, yellow as the amber! By the very God, thou King of England, but if this is not you yourself, then who may it be?" He leaped up, as nervously quick as a gazelle, and grasped both of Godwin's big hands in his own slim fingers. "Godwin, surely before Allah you are that conqueror!"

"Well, I'll be hanged," said Godwin of England.

## CHAPTER IX

*I swear by the fig and by the olive, by Mount Sinai, And by this inviolate soil of Mecca!*

—*The Koran: The Fig*

THEY ALL sat silently for a while, and a slave brought them dainty cups of Chinese tea. At last Godwin relieved himself of a loud groan.

"El Sareuk, I'm in a mood to credit anything tonight. I've heard tales of supernatural beings that would ordinarily make me roar with laughter; I've seen a man come up through this carpet like a flea out of Dirty John's beard, and I've been quiet while you spun me a yarn out of a fairy book." The Saracen made as if to speak, and Godwin waved his hand. "No, no, I believe you. Don't ask me why, for all my life till this week has been war, blood, and solid flesh to hack and carve, with never a ghost or goblin to see anywhere. But yesterday my horse tripped on a single hair that left rope burns, and today I pursued a great troop of Saracens who disappeared rather startlingly." He gave Ramizail a quizzical glance, and she hung her head. "So I'm in a mood to believe practically any tale you want to tell me. All right. You have me prisoner. You want my promise to come out and besiege this miraculous city of wicked spirits for you. If I don't agree, you won't let me go back to Jaffa. I know! That's your proposition." He sipped scalding tea. "All right," he shouted ferociously, "all right, damn it, I'll do it."

"My gratitude shall be as eternal as the shifting sands of the desert, and as limitless. My head and my life are yours to command," said the Lord Mohammed El Sareuk simply. "In return I give you back your freedom, and when you have leveled Dar el Baida, I shall heap a hundred fighting camels with gold and silk and

spices, with silver ornaments and the finest Damascus weapons man has ever wrought; I shall give you jewels to make your eyes burst with joy, and two thousand Turcomans to fight at your side when you go on with your crusading. Nothing I or my people can buy or steal, but shall be yours if you conquer Dar el Baida. I swear it by all I deem sacred."

"To hell with that," said Godwin roughly. "I have as healthy a desire for loot as any man, but a bargain between gentlemen should be even. My life—and nobody ever heard Godwin declare before tonight that his life was anyone's except his own!—my life and freedom, in return for my sword at the walls of your magic fortress. A deal?"

They shook hands gravely. "Can you persuade some of your knights to fight with you?"

"Sure. Dick couldn't be kept away, and there's old Lyulf the Scot, who wields as heavy a sword as I do. Dirty John's contingent are always wild for a brawl, and at least fifty more will follow where I lead 'em, whether it's to Jerusalem or to Hell. I can come with five hundred at least. That ought to do it."

"There will be many legions with terrible black magic allied against you, dear Godwin," put in the girl. "I will come with my djinn to combat the things your sword can't harm."

"And I will come," said El Sareuk, "with Turcomans and Seljuk Turks, Mamelukes and Bedouins, Egyptians and Moorish mercenaries, assassins from the Old Man of the Mountain, renegade Franks and Armenians, and the fierce Soldarii, all to the number of forty thousand."

Godwin bounded up and began to pace back and forth over the rich carpets, beating his hands together with excitement. "Listen, El Sareuk," he shouted, "if your story's true, and there is such a place, and we can as-

semble 'a crew of fighters like that, then before God I swear I'll do it for nothing, and come back here afterward, if you wish, to put myself in your hands again! What a fight we'll have! What a besieging to sing ballads of! Ramizail," he cried, snatching her up and holding her above his head while she wriggled and shrieked, "you gorgeous young witch, I thank the day that brought me to you and this lean old wolf of yours! What a battle we'll have!"

"If you were a Moslem," said El Sareuk, catching the enormous zest in his turn, "and I were at your side, we two would be Kings of the World!"

So the slaves, brisk to sense the wishes of their master, hurried into the tent with flagons of strong honey mead; and the three drank deeply, though El Sareuk by ordinary was a strict follower of his faith and did not touch liquor. Then Godwin said, "Friend, one boon I'll ask besides my freedom."

"Ask a thousand thousand."

"Just one. Let me get my hands on Morvren."

"He is already tied to a camel, waiting for you at the entrance."

"Ho ho," said Godwin throatily, "wait till he hears what I'm going to do to him!"

## CHAPTER X

*It hath been revealed to me that a company of djinn listened, and said, "Verily, we have heard a marvellous discourse."*

—*The Koran: Djinn*

DICK AND Lyulf sat beside the decorated pool in the court of their King's house, staring at each other and gnawing their lips. They had come in from a frantic search of the city, their minds black with dread. Without the walls, the army of the

Crusaders flew up and down the streets, harrying peaceable citizens with their rough, angry questions.

On her perch, Yellow-eyes the falcon shifted from foot to foot, talking querulously to herself.

"Looking at the bird," said Lyulf gloomily. "I feel she knows that something's wrong with her master. Dick, what drooling idiots we were, to let him go a-strolling through this heathen Jaffa all alone!"

"If I could speak with Morvren for just two minutes," growled Dick, "I'd find out where the King's gone, see if I wouldn't!"

Yellow-eyes gave a piercing cry. The cedar gates flew open and Godwin came into the court, roaring a war song. Behind him, in the hands of a pair of scowling Turcomans, traitorous Morvren reluctantly dragged his heels along the flagstones.

Jovial mirth reigned for full five minutes, punctuated occasionally by bitter accusations of carelessness from the old Scottish warrior; then said Godwin, "Sit, friends, and I'll tell you a tale." He gestured to the mercenaries. "Take the sorcerer out and keep him safe till I have leisure to see to him personally."

Then he repeated to his two friends the substance of what he had seen and heard and done; and Dick was jubilant, while Lyulf was amazed beyond belief.

"Then—my scones and bagpipes! —then you really saw one of the djinn, sire," he gasped.

The sun was rising beyond the walls of Jaffa. Godwin pointed to it dramatically.

"As plainly as I see that lifting ball of flame and brass, I saw the djinni arise from the carpet. And as keenly as I feel the great hawk's talons here on my wrist (God bless thee, Yellow-eyes, thou faithful smiter of hares!), I felt the cold grue touch

my spine at his sudden vanishing. So why should we doubt El Sareuk's fabulous towered city of the afreets? I tell you, it will make a siege to dwarf all legends and histories of warfare that mankind has talked of these countless millennia past!"

"We'll keep your word, sire," said Dick, all aquiver with the prospect. "We'll crumple that fortress like an empty bladder."

"By our vows, though, Godwin, we cannot turn aside from pushing our Crusade to its conclusion," Lyulf reminded him. "So the building of Jaffa's walls must continue."

"Yes, but I promised only five hundred fighters. Fifty knights, and the rest men-at-arms, cooks, armorers, and the builders of siege engines, who are not at work here anyway. It's only a side expedition, Lyulf, and—I gave my word to the Saracen."

"Oh, I wasn't grumbling," said the Scot. "I was just saying we mustn't hinder the Crusade. We'll go, Godwin, we'll go." He rattled his battered old steel blade in its scabbard. "You two have had all the pleasures lately. My sword yearns for work. I'm none so old that I don't like a combat, young Godwin."

"Then we'll sleep for four hours, and marshal our chosen men at noon, in the orchards to the west. By tonight we should be camping outside Dar el Baida, the fortress of the unholy godlings!"

## CHAPTER XI

*The afreets are generally believed to differ from the other djinn in being very powerful and always malicious; but to be in other respects of a similar nature.*

—Lane, *Modern Egyptians*

THE BLACK city of the afreets, called in their twistedly humor-

ous fashion by the name of the White Castle, or Dar el Baida, reared its thin spires and round domes toward the stars in a plain-like valley of the hills far inland from Jaffa.

Its plan was basically the same as any medieval fortified town, although it had been erected in remotest antiquity by the uncanny power of the most abominable of the djinn; a heavy wall surrounded it, expanding here and there into a square, squat "tower", crenelated and pierced with small archers' windows, yet actually no higher than the rest of the wall; within in this stout barricade were many dwellings, two-storied houses, markets, and travesties of mosques—in which these worst of created beings were wont to worship their ancient master, Satan, called Eblis, with diverse and obscene ceremonies. Ringing the whole was a deep moat running brimful of reeking scarlet blood.

The greatest difference in the external appearance of Dar el Baida, as compared with mortal walled cities, was in its building materials. Black they were, one and all: black as perjury, black as sin; jet black as the wing of a raven covered with soot from an auto-da-fe! And this was a terrible pure blackness, this no-color of the afreets' fortress, and far removed from the rainbow-flashing black of Ramizail's hair. No hue showed on the walls and domes of Dar el Baida, neither reflected from the sun nor caught\* in the mists of morning. Nothing, anywhere, save sullen, atrocious, sable black.

No man could ever say where the building stones had been quarried, for they were no stones recognized in this world. They were smooth to the touch as glass, flawless in their surface perfection and in their dead coloring, like giant square black opals. Without the city, they were thus; but upon the inner walls and studded over

the buildings shone flashing black jewels of rare and uncountable kinds. Black diamonds as big as your fist, jetty emeralds carven from the bowels of the earth in mines no human foot ever trod, pitch-dark rubies and a myriad others, all wholly unchaste black.

Amid this barbaric dark splendor moved and passed countless throngs of the afreets, engaged on business and pleasure to tell of which there are no words in the decent languages of the earth.

No one, not even Solomon, first master of the djinn, knew or knows the true form of an afreet. It may be said, This is the shape they take most frequently; or by some, In this guise have I seen an afreet; but of their normal lineaments no man can speak.

So in Dar el Baida they ambled and talked and took their ease in the formations of tall black men and women, their height averaging ten feet from bare soles to the top of their close-tied turbans. They seemed very like the easy-dispositioned djinn who paid homage to the half-caste witch Ramizail. But their eyes were entirely black, with no irises or whites; and thus they differed in appearance from the djinn.

Godwin of England, riding a circuit around the walls of Dar el Baida, saw nothing of the afreets. He saw only the moat awash with sluggishly roiling red liquid, and beyond it the soaring spires and bulky walls of the evil fortress.

IT WAS just before sunset. On his right rode Dick and Ramizail, on his left old Lyulf and the desert wolf, Hadji Mohammed El Sareuk. Behind trotted the standard-bearers, and then a knot of knights under the command of Dirty John, Baron of Bartesme. Encamped on the crest and sides of

a hill some distance away were the forces of Crusaders and the motley hordes of united Easterners. Invisible, disciplined and silent, rank upon rank of djinn filled the flatland between this hill and a point some fifty yards from the red moat; no one could see them but Ramizail, and she only when she touched the gold ring to the sigil and locked their designs together. Godwin, however, equably took her word for it that they were there.

"Look at it, sire," said Dick, as they took a slight rise at a canter. "Just look at the blasted thing. What's it made of, anyway? Black stone?"

"Stone cut from the slopes of Hell," said Ramizail, leaning forward on her palfrey's neck. "When you reach it you'll find it's smooth and hard as—oh, my, I don't know what to compare it with. At any rate, Godwin dear, you'll have an awful time getting in."

"Expect to," said the King cheerfully. "No fun otherwise." He gestured back. "Those sappers and engineers of mine can blast a path through anything, Ramizail. No Hell-quarried rock will keep them out."

Seeing the sun touch the horizon, he urged his great charger into a gallop, in order that they might make the circuit of the fortress before darkness fell. His entourage quickened their pace likewise. Above them floated many banners: those of the King, of Dick and Lyulf, of all the noble Franks; the crescent standard of Islam; and a curious pennant which Ramizail said a djinni had presented her for the occasion. It bore on a purple field the interlocked triangles and circle of Solomon's Seal, stitched in golden thread. "'Twill strike fear to the hearts of the afreets when they peer over their ramparts at it, I assure you," said Ramizail comfortably, glancing up at it.

"That reminds me," said Godwin,

kneeing his mount closer to hers. "Let's get this straight, Mistress Witch. I don't want you casting any spells to incapacitate these creatures, do you understand? I mean to say, I came out here for a fight, and I don't want to burst into the fort and find everybody frozen rigid or tied up with fairy ropes, or anything of the sort. My lads want some opposition."

"Heavens, you'll get it, Godwin love! Do you think I'm able to affect these beings with my paltry magic? Godwin," she said, "I've told you and told you, all the powers that I have come from my djinn. The afreets are stronger than the djinn, so it stands to reason—if you know that word—that I can't paralyze them or annihilate them except in rare cases. I'll tell you again what I will do: I'll combat their magic with mine, and leave the physical brawling to your fellows and El Sareuk's. Oh, mark me, some of their sorcery will get through at you. I can't stop it all. They're tough and wily, those demons in there. But I can bore and sap and undermine their malevolent charms. In the long run," said she, frowning prettily, "they'll beat me. But coupled with your brute strength, maybe somehow we'll win. There's always the prophecy, you know."

"If I understood the nature of djinni and afreet a little better, it'd be a help," said the King.

"Well, I'll simplify it for you. My djinn can be killed by men. So can the afreets. They're susceptible to wounds just like you and Dick. But they're frightfully strong."

**S**OME OF THEM can fly, you know: not by flapping their arms like a bird, but just by thinking themselves away from the earth, though they can't do it very often. It drains their vitality. They get pale

as white gauze, and can scarcely sit up after they've flown. It's the same with those of the afreets who are able to fly. I doubt you'll have much trouble with these in that respect, because they'll save all their energies for fighting and spells.

"The djinn can move forward and back in time, but that again is hard for them and they hate to do it.

"They can raise up phantoms to bemuse you, as they did that day on the hill of El Hattab. Now if the afreets do that, my djinn will dispel the phantoms right away, so you'll always be sure that you're fighting real creatures and not air.

"I guess that's about all. There will be other things to contend with, Godwin, but I'll do my best to keep the air cleared of magic for you. My soul, you'll have enough to do without worrying about witchery! Those gentry are tough and nasty and as wicked as Eblis himself."

"Something else," said Godwin. "How am I going to distinguish between djinn and afreets in the fight? I don't want to hack up your cohorts."

"The afreets can't pronounce 'S' very well," said she. "They lisp. So if you hear one say 'Die, thcoundrel!' or anything like that, you'll know he's an afreet."

"Oh, great," said Godwin. "All I have to do is cross swords with everything I see and beg him to call me a scoundrel. Splendid."

"Look at their eyes, then. The afreets have no whites."

"Another thing. Your djinn are invisible now. How do we know that there aren't spies from the afreets out here invisible too?"

"Djinni and afreet are visible to one another at all times, and I'll hear of it if they send out spies. They won't bother, though. They have enormous



As Godwin and Ramizail sat their mounts overlocking the walled city, it seemed as if the air were filled with magic beings

Sheep

faith in their fortress."

"First thing to do," interrupted Lyulf, "is bridge or fill up that horrid moat."

"Can we do that, or will they prevent it with magic?"

"They'll try. Maybe I can checkmate them, and maybe not. Goodness gracious, Godwin, I don't really know how things will shape up," she said. "We'll just have to wait and see. But remember, there is always the prophecy. You'll break them, I *know* you will!"

So they galloped around the citadel of Dar el Baida, and returned to their cooking fires and their tents, to sleep fitfully through the night, plagued by nightmares and yearning for the dawn to come. All night, long the hammers crashed and the hastily-set-up forges roared, as siege engines were built and hurling machines assembled; weapons were edged afresh, and armorers sweated over their suits of chain.

## CHAPTER XII

*And the sentence passed on the peoples of djinn and men...hath become their due, and they shall perish.*

—*The Koran: The Made Plain*

THEY DRESSED Godwin in his best suit of oiled fighting mail, carefully laced down his helmet, and belted on his heaviest sword. Yellow-eyes, the peregrine falcon, clave to his shoulder and would not be persuaded to leave him. When he was ready, and just as daybreak burst upon the valley below, he ran to his horse and leaped to the saddle in his usual way, flying with all his weighty armor up over the steed's tail and slamming down over the cantle into a firm seat. He swept down the hill, passing through the camp of El Sareuk's

hordes with his broadsword waving in a rough, friendly salute, and came to the level and galloped for the red moat of the citadel of the afreets.

His engineers, sappers, builders of siege machines, and tacticians were gathered on its brink, walking about, crouching on their knees and judging distances, calculating one thing and another, very busy, very absorbed, very eager.

"Well, sirrahs!" roared Godwin of England, standing in his stirrups. "Well? Can you do it?"

The senior tactician, Hugh of Hoxton, a knight old and skilled in his craft, came limping over to the King. "Sire, we'll have to make us a bridge over the vile stuff. No mortal man could swim through it, nor can we find the bottom with a weighted line. Gods, sire, it must be hundreds of feet deep!"

"Why can't it be swum?" asked the King curiously. Of course none of the knights would have tried, for swimming in armor was beyond even the giant strength of Godwin; but rafts, now, with some of the tougher men-at-arms to swim and push them....

"Sire, 'tis blood!" cried the ancient tactician. "Unholy it is, sire! You know the old rhyme? 'For all the blood that's shed on earth runs through the springs of that countree?' I'm thinking we've come to yon very selfsame place, for this stuff—arrgh! 'Tis gore, thick hot life's blood of a million lads, I'll lay oath!"

Godwin dismounted, took off one gauntlet and dabbed his forefinger in the moat. He sniffed the scum of red, regarded it closely, and touched it to his tongue.

"God and the Holy Sepulcher aid us! It *is* blood! As warm as if it came this instant from a slit gullet!"

"Have I not just assured you of the fact?" grumbled the other.

"My enemies in France and England have often accused me of wading through blood to my goals. What would they think if I went home to tell them I'd swum in the stuff?" Godwin chuckled. "Very well, it must be a bridge, then, Alwyn!" he called to his chief engineer.

"Sire?"

"A bridge, Alwyn. How soon?"

"Hell and threselocks! Let me see." Alwyn squinted across the moat. "It's none so wide. Look here, sire: we'll make us a bridge on the land, of the biggest, stoutest trees we can find. Right there. Then we'll upend it and let it fall across. That way we won't have to touch the scarlet stuff."

"You fellows are unduly squeamish this morning.... Over that way I saw plenty of big cedars. Cut them and make your bridge. I want it before noon." Alwyn popped his eyes wide. "Take all the men you need," said the King impatiently. "Damn it, take half the forces! Make it a wide bridge, sirrah, and if it breaks, so will your skull. Get on!"

El Sareuk came up, his little pony going like the wind. He reined it to a skidding halt beside the Englishman. "My legions are ready, O King," he said formally.

"Good. We'll have 'em a bridge before long. Ride with me now, Hadji," said Godwin. "We'll occupy ourselves with plans, eh? Can't simply sit here watching other men work. Let's travel around this frightful object," he suggested, pointing at the fortress. They moved off at a trot. "What prevents that gore from clotting, do you imagine?"

"Magic, incredible and malefic magic. Necromancy of the most evil." El Sareuk shook his lean old head. "Godwin, as I gaze on this black walled city, I must admit I'm frightened. Nowhere else on earth are so many ill-intentioned spirits of flame

and air gathered together to pit their powers against man's. Prophecy or no prophecy, I feel qualms of faintness and terror. See here," he said, leaning toward the Crusader, "it isn't too late yet. Suppose we band together, Godwin, and ride off with all our people, to conquer and loot and rule the world! The sane, normal, rich and waiting world of mortals! You and I, we could be monarchs of all men. Leave this valley of Hell with me! Embrace Islam, and become my brother in all things! We were made for brothers, thou and I!"

"Surely I think we were. But let's talk about that after we level this citadel to the ground, and fill up her bloody moat with the bodies of a hundred thousand afreets!" Godwin laughed. "It's the waiting that's annoying you, Hadji Mohammed. You'll be all right when we're galloping over the bridge. I've seen the same vacillations in stout Lyulf before a brawl. It's only the waiting."

EL SAREUK said, "I hope you're right. Remember, I have lived out sixty years in this country, with djinns and afreet upon every hand, and I know their uncanny powers."

"Poof," retorted Godwin airily. "I spit in their collective eye. My broadsword can drink from an afreet's veins as readily as from a man's. I say," he went on, changing the subject to distract El Sareuk from his superstitious tremblings, "where did you learn to speak English, Mohammed? You talk as well as I do. Better, hang it! I've never had time for formal study of words and literature and all that stuff. You sound like my old tutor."

"Why, I learned from Ramizail's father. He lived among us for near a score of years, dying but three summers ago. I owe to him what poor command I have over the tongue."

At mention of the girl, Godwin's

face clouded. He wished with all his heart to come out and ask a straightforward question about her relationship with El Sareuk, but the query stuck in his throat. Instead, he said, "Where is Ramizail?"

"Watching her beloved djinn. Mihrjan is drilling them on the plain."

"Drilling? Like soldiers?"

"Somewhat the same."

"The nature of these heathen spirits," said Godwin, "astounds me. I can't grasp it."

"Imagine they are men; but with certain magic powers."

Godwin nodded uncertainly. "Well, well! Let's ride. I want a look at the other side of this place again."

They circled Dar el Baida. When they had come back opposite the closed drawbridge, the King said, "As I'd thought, El Sareuk, there's our only entrance. Everywhere else the walls rise smooth. We'll raise our bridge, slam her down across the fosse, and after a wave of archers and knights pass over, we'll drag the siege engines and sows and belfries across. Praise be, there's enough earth between moat and fortress to give us room to use them. We'll work on that tower, and on that—" he indicated the crenelated buttress-like towers, squat and black, that flanked the drawbridge-shuttered gates—"with the two siege castles; while we see if something can't be done about bringing down the ruddy drawbridge. God! This ought to be fun. My fingers are tingling now! Let's get some action started."

He tugged at his yellow beard, then wheeled and went charging off toward the camp. El Sareuk followed him.

"Bowmen!" howled Godwin at the top of his mighty voice. "Archers to the moat! Carry down the mangonels, the ballistae, the gyns and tribuchets! We'll give 'em a taste of what's coming, by my halidom! We'll flick 'em

with our lash, we'll touch the devils up with a few arrows and a little fire! Take down half the store of Sicilian flints! Plenty of iron darts for the casters! Halloo, halloo! Forward, bullies! Get off your haunches and live!"

The Crusaders took flame at his voice, as they had done at Acre and Jaffa; and the Moslems turned to one another and said fiercely, "Hark to the roaring of the lusty bull! Today, brothers, we fight under a man!"

### CHAPTER XIII

*When the Heaven shall cleave  
asunder,  
And when the stars shall disperse,  
And when the graves shall be  
turned upside down....  
When the sun shall be folded up,  
And when the stars shall fall,  
And when the mountains shall be  
set in motion,  
And when the seas shall boil,  
And when Hell shall be made to  
blaze.*

—*The Korans: The Cleaving;  
The Folded Up*

"**G**IVE ME AN arbalest," said Godwin. "It's fitting that I start this affray. The best arbalest you have, and hasten!"

"Give the King an arbalest, one of you caitiff rogues," shouted Dirty John.

A Bowman put his weapon in the King's hands. Godwin, who was as skilled with a crossbow as with his broadsword, lifted it, judged wind and distance automatically, and sent a shaft hurtling up at the blazing blue sky. It arched and fell into the city of the afreets. A great yell burst from the plain behind him, where more than forty thousand warriors waited impatiently for action.

"Fire!" bellowed Godwin.

There was a prodigious humming and the air was darkened with a flight of arrows. Following the King's, they described their huge arc and dropped within the citadel of Dar el Baida.

"Catapults!"

A multitude of terrible iron darts flew across the stream of blood and vanished beyond the black walls.

"Gyns! Ballistae and mangonels!" shouted the young monarch happily.

The well-seasoned arms of the hurling machines crashed in a ragged chorus, the counterweights dropped with earth-shaking violence, the beams creaked and flew up, and ton upon ton of Sicilian flints and round rocks pried from the hills near Jaffa sped like incredible birds in flight, some to strike the smooth walls, others to disappear beyond them. To the eager watchers, Dar el Baida seemed to shudder and quake on its foundations. The echoes drummed as stone after stone thudded into the fortress.

"Now the tribuchets!" ordered Godwin, wriggling in his saddle. "The heavy engines, lads! Let 'em speak!"

The tribuchets blasted out their defiance. El Sareuk, sitting his horse beside Godwin's, grasped the King by the arm. "Look, look! The crack! They've opened a crack in the wall!"

It was true. The tribuchets, flinging the heaviest stones procurable, had battered open a branching fracture that ran from the top of the wall for a score of feet downward. "It's not impregnable, Godwin!" shouted the Saracen. "It *can* be split! I cry thanks to Allah for that sign!"

"Now, men," said Godwin through his vizor, "before they recover from their surprise, splash the fiends with Greek fire! Sulphur and burning wads of oil-soaked tow! Shower the city with flame as thick as snow in an English January! Byzantine naphtha! Sea fire and clay bombs! Gren-

ades of hell's-broth in pottery! Keep it up till you've used a full third of the stock! Don't let the bastards breathe anything but flame until your arms ache like sin and your tongues loll to your waists! Go on!"

And now the air between shore and fort was all a ruddy hissing redness, as catapults of all kinds were pressed into service as flame weapons. Greek fire and the terrible naphtha bombs of El Sareuk's contributing went raging at the afreetish citadel, and passing over the walls entered the till-now-unprofaned streets and passages; whence a thick gagging smoke arose toward the sun, together with licking tongues of fire and a great outcry and wailing.

The Saracens, whose lives had been spent in fear of the evil spirits, now milled and leaped up and screeched their glee like delirious children. The Crusaders slapped each other on the back and laughed to see their King impress the heathen.

"More, more!" thundered Godwin above the tumult. "Don't let 'em suck so much as a single whiff of air! Feed them the fire, damn their gullets! Broil 'em! Bubble their eyes from their dirty heads! More darts! More stones! More arrows! More flame!"

Ramizail rode up to him. Her violet eyes were bright with admiration. "Godwin, Godwin," she said, "what a magnificent wild beast you are, truly!"

He pushed his vizor up and winked. "This is my element, Ramizail, as yours is witchery and subtle magic. I'll wager you looked the same as you conjured up that *harka*."

"Oh, do let the *harka* drop, Godwin. I'm sorry about it. Honestly. It was an irresponsible whim. Listen, one of my djinn says to watch out, for the afreets will probably counterattack in a moment. Don't bunch your men so. Spread them out a little.

They can expand their ranks clear back to the hills and it won't do your plans any harm...besides, enemy missiles won't kill so many at a blow. There's no earthly need to have everybody pushing and shoving just to get close to the moat and watch."

Dick galloped off at a word from the King, to order the troops to fan out and open their files. El Sareuk sent two messengers to likewise instruct his motley forces.

THE MANGONELS crashed, the arbalests hummed, the fire hissed and roared and blotted out the sky; Godwin accepted the Saracen leader's own bow and with it shot an arrow that sang a high tune through the air and appeared to fall directly in the heart of Dar el Baida. The crack in the great wall widened, and above it now appeared the head and shoulders of an afreet—the first the besiegers had seen. He was scarcely more than a black dot on the crest of the wall. They could see him lift a fist and shake it furiously.

"Here's your bow," said Godwin. "Let me have a shot with my arbalest, and then you try for him." Quickly he fitted an arrow to the crossbow and let it fly. El Sareuk eyed its flight, muttered, "Too high," and almost without aiming sent a thin shaft speeding after it. The crossbow quarrel sped harmlessly over the afreet, he made a rude gesture, and the Saracen's shaft skewered his head like a Pike piercing a pumpkin.

"Oh, fine, bloody fine!" cried Godwin.

"You were hampered by your helmet and armor," said El Sareuk. "It was hardly a fair test of skill. Some day we must play at archery with equal weapons."

"A date.... Faster with that Greek fire, you doddering women! Pour it on 'em!"

The citadel was smoking like an

open furnace. Ramizail said, divining his thought, "That's not Dar el Baida that's afire, it's your wads and bombs and such that are burning out. There's nothing in the city that can burn except the afreets."

"Well, there's a rare lot of them blazing, then. Go on, you limping, staggering, purblind cripples! Give them hell!"

At last they came to the end of their first third of fire weapons, and halted one by one for more orders. Godwin rode back and forth on the shore of the fosse, directing the propelling of heavy flints toward the crack in the wall, which was just to the rear of the left-hand gate tower. Sweat bathed him within his sun-hot armor, but he would not even remove the helmet now, for he was in a battle and it was not knightly to think of comfort at such a time.

Ramizail on her white palfrey came to him and he said jokingly, "Where's the counterattack, witch-wench? Your djinni seems to have been wrong. You know what I think? I think that black unholy place is full of human beings, and they've existed there for centuries on their reputation, with everyone afraid to say Boo to them for fear of being blasted theurgically. Look at that crack! Look at the smoke in thick columns! Tell me that's a city full of evil spirits, who can change their shapes, and fly, and go forward in time, and all such nonsense!"

"Godwin," she said, pushing a stray lock of jet hair under the edge of her orange and red turban, "it'd serve you right if I left the field and watched you be torn to pieces. Why, you great hulking man, my djinn are weary already with combating the afreets' incantations! Do you know they just shot an invisible bolt at you? Mihrjan caught it on his shield, or you'd be spitted and writhing now."

"Caught an invisible bolt on his invisible shield, did he?" said Godwin. "My, my. Thank him for me."

"Oh, you drooling idiot!" she cried. "Here! I can't convince you any other way! Take these! See for yourself! You and your Western arrogance, and pride in stupidity! Here!" She unlooped the chain of the sigil from her throat, and pushed it at him together with her golden ring. He stripped off a glove and took them, grinning. "Now press them together," said the girl angrily. "Go on, you've seen me do it. Hold them together in your hand, and look about you." Godwin did so curiously. Dick, riding up at that moment with Lyulf and Alwyn, the chief engineer, was startled to see his beloved King reel back in the saddle and turn pasty under his tan.

"My God, what is it, sire?" he shouted.

**G**ODWIN ignored him. Clenching the ancient gold ornaments until they nearly cut his fingers, he gripped the pommel of the saddle with the other hand and stared open-mouthed all around.

As though Cadmus had sown here the dragon's teeth, from all about him on the plain of the valley had sprung up legions and armies of giant black men, turbanned, clad in varicolored trousers and jackets, holding in their capable hands scimitars and knives and strange unknown weapons. A number of them stood around his very horse, great yellow-white shields of metal on their arms. Not a man of them was less than ten feet in height. Their faces were streaming with sweat, and bright teeth gleamed between panting lips.

As he glared at them, distrusting his sight, a hissing arrow tipped with bronze flame came shooting toward him. Automatically he lifted his hand in a futile checking motion; but one

of the djinn was before him, and with a flirt of his huge shield deflected the missile. It whined off and vanished in smoke. Godwin said fervently, "Oh, Jerusalem!"

"What happened?" asked Ramlzail, giggling a little.

"Mihrjan just stopped another. I--I suppose you are Mihrjan?"

"That is my insignificant name, Lord of the Yellow Beard," boomed the giant black, bowing deep.

"I met you the other evening, I remember. Well, th-thanks, Mihrjan."

"It is less than nothing, Lord. Allah wills it that you live to destroy Dar el Baida. I am but His humble slave."

"Are you djinn of the Moslem faith, too?" asked Godwin, interested in spite of the imminent collapse of his nervous system.

"Oh, assuredly, Lord of my Life."

"Who in heaven's name are you talking to, sire?" blurted Dick, edging closer.

"Why, Mihrjan here."

"Mihrjan where?"

"Right here," said Godwin testily. "The splendid chap who turned that arrow from my chest."

"What arrow?"

"Oh, never mind," said Godwin, recollecting himself. "It's just that I can see the djinn now, Dick. Continue the siege. Go away. I'm busy."

Dick and Lyulf cantered off, their eyes bulging with wonder. Alwyn, waiting a moment, said, "The bridge is ready, sire."

"What? Oh, yes, certainly, the bridge. What do you say, Mihrjan? Are we ready to cross the moat?"

"In delay there lies no plenty," said the djinni, quoting a poet yet unheard-of in the King's age. "With all speed, Lord of my Being, should the bridge be placed across the dreadful stream. I think you must break Dar el Baida this very day, or we will all give up our carcasses to the jackal

and the vulture."

"Right you are," said the Englishman. "Alwyn, bring on your vaunted bridge."

Alwyn rode away, scratching his red head vigorously. The King turned to glance at the black fortress.

"Great fiery chariots! Look at the creatures!" he bawled out, astounded. The parapets of Dar el Baida were lined with screaming, fist-shaking afarets. "There must be thirty thousand."

"We can't see them," said Ramizail. "Only by the power of Solomon's Seal can you descry them yourself, Godwin dear."

"See here, Mihrjan, Ramizail says you can combat the afarets' spells pretty adequately."

"What we can do, that we do cheerfully," said the black.

"Can't you make them visible? It would help enormously."

"If we do, they will retaliate by making us visible also, Lord."

"What will that hurt? *They* can see you now, and it would hearten my fellows no end to have all your forces appear on our side."

"Well," said Mihrjan dubiously, "I suppose it would do no harm. 'Tis only that we are more accustomed to invisibility, and I had thought to wait until the last moment before using my powers against the afarets in the matter. You should warn your men, Lord."

"Yes, or they'd all die of fits, I guess.... Stop that infernal racket, you engineers! I want to make an announcement."

So he did so, and when everyone had been cautioned not to perish of fright on beholding the legions of djinn, he nodded to their leader. Mihrjan raised a hand. Instantly the djinn appeared. To Godwin all seemed the same, but his men shouted with blank astonishment. Until that instant, most of the Crusaders

had been secretly doubtful about such outlandish entities. Now, thought Godwin with a grin, they knew.

He gave Ramizail her sigil and ring. Peering through the drifts of smoke that hung over the moat, he saw that the afarets were now in evidence too; and as angry as a disturbed hive of bees about it. A corps of their archers let loose a very tangible flight of arrows, and many of the English and El Sareuk's men sank to the ground, gasping their lives out through torn mouths and ripped throats.

"You can see them now!" howled Godwin, waving his sword furiously. "Fire, you proud marksmen! Don't stand here gaping at your new allies! There are your targets, curse you! Fire! Fire! Fire!"

And rallying round their dynamic King once more, the crossbowmen went into action; the mangonels sang and thudded; the tribuchets boomed their hollow death-gong as they flung gigantic rocks at the foe and presently the afarets retired from their walls, to be seen no more for a season.

#### CHAPTER XIV

*He shall say, "Enter ye into the fire with the generations of djinn and men who have preceded you.... Avaunt, ye dwellers in the flame!"*

—*The Koran: Al Araf; The Kingdom*

"LAY DOWN a barrage of flame," barked Godwin, galloping along the line of casters. "Use up half the remaining stores—more if needs must. Keep it away from the bridge, and if you hit any of us when we get over, I'll nail your pelts to the walls of the citadel! Now begin!"

He spurred his charger to the place where Alwyn's men had upended their

rough, heavy gangplank of cedar logs lashed with leather. About him gathered his friends: Dick, very happy and grimed black in the face from working with fire weapons; grizzled Lyulf, his thin lips curled in a grimace of eager ferocity; Dirty John, thick as an oak in his battered old armor, making passes at the air with his sword and muttering "Caitiff rogue, take that!" for practice; red-headed Alwyn and the ancient senior tactician, Hugh of Hoxton; El Sareuk, his lean frame clad in gold-washed Turkish armor with a black Bedouin burnous over his shoulders, testing the edge of his Damascus scimitar grimly; Mihrjan, chief of Ramizail's djinn, with a squad of his uncanny, silent blacks; many of the Crusader knights, resplendent in their battle armor; the gonfanoniers, gripping the poles of their myriad pennants and battle standards; and Ramizail herself, all perfection of coolness and beauty, sitting her white palfrey as calmly as though she were home in the streets of quiet Jaffa.

"Ramizail," said Godwin angrily, "get back! This is no place for a lady."

"Thank you, dear, but I go where my djinn go, and that's an end of it."

"Do not argue with her," counseled El Sareuk. "She is an impossible young creature at such moments. Allah will surely protect her."

"Ready when you are, sire," said Alwyn. Along the fosse the casters crashed, and fire in sheets and streams went sizzling through the already-torrid air. Godwin shouted, "Let go the bridge!" Then they all held their breath and watched the cedar logs as they teetered, swayed downward, then thundered across the moat and struck the opposite shore. "By God," said the King, "not more than two feet to spare. Good work, though, Alwyn." He rose in his stirrups, broadsword straight up, so that all his men could

see him and be heartened. "The Holy Sepulcher will aid us! Forward!" And in the forefront of a sweeping tide of knights and Saracens and running djinn he pounded onto the rude bridge.

They were across almost before they knew it, and flanking out galloped under the black frowning walls of Dar el Baida. When the first wave had crossed, comprising some hundreds of men, the sweating Mameluke slaves of El Sareuk commenced to push across the first of the two wooden belfries; a siege castle of four stories, brought from Jaffa and put together with enormous toil the night before on the plain. Moving ponderously, like some fantastic juggernaut, on its great wheels, the pair of heavy rams swaying in its center, the loose-hung bridges at the top clanking as though impatient to be spanning the gulf between belfry and citadel wall, it came lurching over toward Godwin's gang. Behind it marshaled another force of knights and archers, Turcomans and the fiery desert fighters, the Bedouins.

Meanwhile the King and his cohorts trotted leisurely out to draw up in a line that stretched for many scores of yards to left and right of the big gate, with Godwin and his closest followers immediately opposite that barred and impregnable-looking entrance. At a sign from him, the four trumpeters put their olifants to their lips and blew a deafening blast.

"You in there!" bawled the King in a stentorian voice. "You foul afreets! Open in the name of the monarch of England, the yellow-bearded conqueror from the West who was named as your overthower in the days of Solomon!" El Sareuk had coached him in that speech. "Let down your drawbridge and give up your miserable lives!"

WHAT HAPPENED then was enough to make every hair on

every Frankish head stand straight up with terror, even after the wonders that had already come to pass; for out from the wall above them there leisurely floated a gargantuan afreet, supported on thin air, and holding in his hands a great kettle of boiling pitch!

Out he came, forty feet above their tipped gaping faces, swinging the black kettle in a jaunty manner so that little bubbling drops of pitch slopped out and spattered on the ground at their horses' feet. It was obvious that he was making for a spot directly over the King. Quick as thought, one of the djinn soared up to do battle with him, eight-foot scimitar gleaming in the sun's rays. The startled afreet shot forward to reach his goal, but the djinni was there already, grinning fiendishly over his blade. The afreet maneuvered to one side, the djinni turning to halt him with one eye always on Godwin's position. "Gods," gasped the King, "was there ever before such a fantastic duel!"

The afreet, weaponless, cautiously shifted through the atmosphere, now here, now there; but he could not dislodge the djinni from his post. Howling with rage, he made as if to hurl the contents of his kettle slantways at Godwin's head. The djinni streaked at him with scimitar leveled like a lance, the afreet dodged—not quite soon enough. The reddened blade stood out twenty inches from his back. He gave a choking cry and, falling, dropped the kettle; at once Ramizail's servant dived and caught its handle. From the wall darted an arrow, and the djinni uttered a stricken gurgle as it passed through his chest. The kettle of pitch swung hazardously from his weakening hand, but Godwin directly beneath it, could not move his charger away, for he was enthralled with the grotesque scene. The djinni summoned his dying

powers and with a shout of "Allah aid me!" swooped out over the moat, hovered there an eternal instant, and then fell with a rush into the terrible tarn of blood. The boiling pitch hissed and steamed and the scarlet liquid closed above it and the gallant djinni with a sucking, curdling noise. The surface cleared and the blood seemed more red than ever....

"Ramizail," said Godwin, rather shaken, "I hope that doesn't happen very often. I can fight anything that's land-bound, but birds—well, no."

"Not many afreets can levitate," she said, biting her lips. "And they won't do it except as a last resort, any more than the common djinn will."

"What's wrong?"

"That was Ja'afar, one of my favorites, who saved your life at the price of his own."

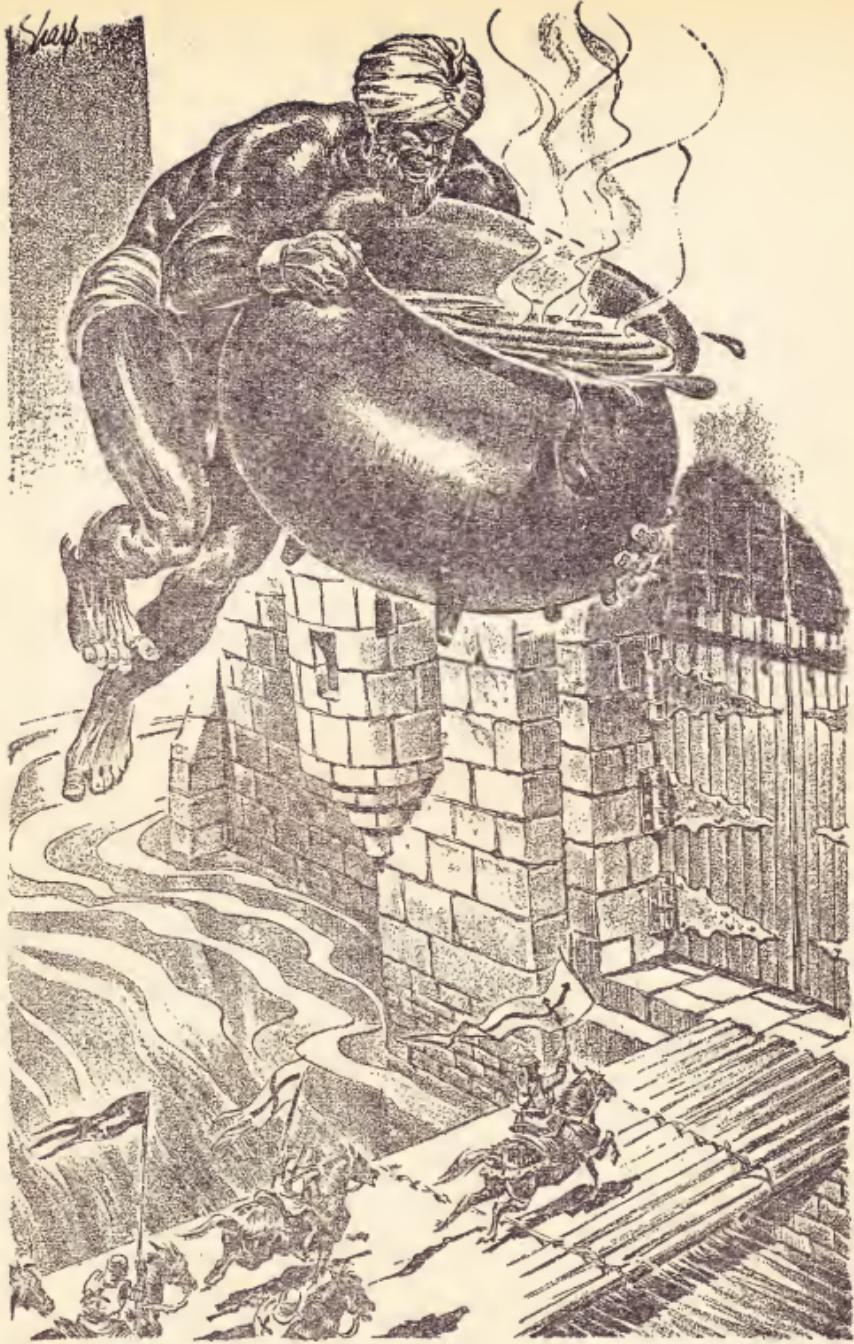
"Oh," said Godwin, abashed. "I'm sorry. It was a noble deed."

"A lot you care if he died," sniffed the girl.

Mihrjan, who was standing at Godwin's bridle, spoke up. "Peace, Mistress, for you do not understand the ways of a fighting man, being as yet a child, though the Queen of my Life. Peace, I say. Your Yellowbeard sorrows in his fashion."

She nodded silently, mollified. Godwin shouted, "Ho, there, get that belfry against the right tower!" and galloped off to see to it. Those men not engaged with the mighty siege engine moved up and down below the walls, firing arrows at anything rash enough to appear on the crest of the wall.

**THE BELFRY** lodged with a reverberating bang against the tower. Its upper story was several feet lower than the parapet of Dar el Baida. "Hell!" grunted Godwin. He had hoped it would overtop the walls. "Now we'll have to crawl up, in the face of Lord knows what. Well, at it,



The aifret tipped the kettle of boiling pitch as the Crusaders crossed the bridge...

son, at it," he said to Dick, and the two of them entered the hide-covered wooden tower and ascended the ladders into the second, then the third story. "Get those rams to work," he shouted. At once the men-at-arms began to swing the twin iron-headed battering beams against the black wall. When the King and his friend climbed higher they had to cling with all their might to the rungs, as the belfry shook and quivered to the rhythmic thumping of the rams.

On the open top, back in one corner beneath a protective screen of willow and aspen branches interwoven tightly together, a company of archers awaited their orders. Half a dozen engineers slaved over a medium-sized mangonel, which was lobbing pottery bombs full of naphtha and liquid fire into the fortress.

"Drop the bridges," said Godwin, stalking to the edge of the belfry and peering up at the parapets. "My halidom, what a job this will be. Go ahead, drop 'em."

The fitted bridges fell with a crash. Their gangplanks extended over the enemy's wall to a length of perhaps four feet. The slant was forty degrees from the horizontal.

"Archers," said Dick. "Let some of them scuttle up and spy out the land. There doesn't seem to be anybody on the thing."

At Godwin's command, half a dozen warriors with nocked quarrels set on their crossbows trotted up the bridges. They halted at the ends, scanning the top of the tower swiftly; then one shouted, over the hubbub of the rams and the casters' missiles, "Not a soul, sire!"

Godwin unsheathed his broadsword and ran heavily up the gangway. It was true; the top of the righthand gate tower was in their possession without so much as a single dagger's disputing.

"Queer," said Godwin to Dick,

"Damned queer. Let's take a look across to the other tower, eh?"

They jumped from the bridge to the broad parapet, which ran along two sides of the tower at a height of five feet from its flooring; on the sides which would otherwise have overlooked the interior of the city and the beginning of the wall, it shot up to fifteen feet, so that nothing could be seen from here excepting the outer world. They went catlike along the parapet to its corner, and peered across at the twin tower.

The second belfry had been jammed against it, and archers under Lyulf's direction were streaming onto the tower's top. It was built on the same plan as the one which Godwin had captured thus bloodlessly.

"Cursed strange, Dick. Let's have a closer look." They leaped down and made a circuit of the place. There were no doors, no entrances. It was a blind alley.

"By the rood, Godwin! We haven't captured a thing!" shouted Dick, so wrathful that tears formed in his eyes. "We might as well be on the ground!"

Godwin opened his vizor and scratched his nose. "Hmm. Not so bad as that, Dick, though that's the afreets' opinion too, I'll warrant you. See here: we can put scaling ladders against those walls, and it'll be a thousand times better to slip from one of them and fall to the tower than it would be if you fell off a ladder that was based on the ground below.... Then we can work on the fastenings of the drawbridge from here. Let men down on ropes from this corner, and they can cut through those chains, eh? Or else—I have it! We'll use the rams on them! We'll have the drawbridge down across the moat in half an hour!"

"I guess it isn't so terrible as I'd thought. Well, let's go, sire."

They hurried back to the belfry,

and archers began to pour up the fitted bridges and onto the blind tower's top. Scaling ladders were ordered from below. Godwin rubbed his mailed hands together.

"Dick, my dear old Dick, we'll be at grips with the demons before you can say 'Ramizail's lips!'"

## CHAPTER XV

*When the servant of God stood up to call upon Him, the djinn almost jostled him by their crowds.*

—*The Koran: Djinn*

THEY FILLED the tower—properly, of course, not a tower at all, but a bulge in the wall separated from the wall's top by the fifteen-foot barricade of stone—with archers and Bedouin warriors; then, propelled by the weary Mameluke slaves, the belfry creaked sideways for a few feet to bring the battering rams within range of the great chains which held the drawbridge perpendicular. The second siege castle was similarly moved. Well within the half hour predicted by the King, the chains were crushed, the links cracked and shattered, and the drawbridge began to shiver.

"Get the belfries away, hasten!" came the bull's bellow of bronze-throated Godwin; and hardly had the two hide-covered towers been shoved aside when there came a piercing shriek of metal parting from metal, and the bridge fell ponderously across the moat and half-buried its thick end in the earth of the plain beyond. A cry of joy tore the heated air to tatters, as fifty thousand besiegers bawled their satisfaction.

Now the gates of Dar el Baida were exposed; gates that seemed as heavy as the bulwarks of Hell, a pair of black barred iron portals so weighty that—even had they been unbarred—

no score of men under Godwin's command could have budged them though they tried for a week.

The King hesitated, then reached out, grasped a hanging rope, levered himself over the side of the belfry's third story and slid rapidly down to the ground. "Alwyn, Hugh, the rest of you, get your sappers on those things. Dig under 'em. Work till your nails come off. Kill half your men if you must, but get into the place!" He was off at a run before they had saluted.

El Sareuk was flying back and forth in the shadow of the walls, urging his men to fire as swift as thought; for afreets had shown themselves again on the ramparts, and were hurling down Greek fire, sulphur, and flame-tipped arrows in thick flights. As Godwin came up to him, the corpse of a black afreet dropped with a crunch at the feet of their steeds. "Ha," said El Sareuk fiercely "one more satan gone to the abyss. 'And we guard them from every stoned satan,' says the Koran."

"Give me a thousand of your best fighters," said Godwin urgently. "Send them to the belfries. We're going over the towers onto the wall. We'll need swordsmen and archers. Then spread the word to the djinn and your other lads that the gate will fall before midafternoon. Have them ready to charge into Dar el Baida as soon as they see the gates go."

El Sareuk leaned over and embraced him. "You are the only man who could say such a thing and not bring a bitter laugh to my lips, Godwin of England. We shall be ready. Aa-ah!" he cried, drawing back; then he laughed shamefacedly. "I thought it was an afreet," he said.

The giant falcon, Yellow-eyes, had alighted on Godwin's shoulder. She shook her wings and screeched at the Saracen.

"Gently, thou swashbuckling bird,

gently. This is our friend. See, I take his hand." Godwin chuckled in his turn. "She thought you were fighting with me."

"What a devil," said El Sareuk. "What a hawk to set upon veritable elephants!"

"A thousand of your best, remember," repeated the King, and turning his charger, went bucketing back to the gates.

**R**AMIZAIL rode out of the mists of smoke and flame to El Sareuk's side. "Is he all right?" she asked anxiously. "He hasn't been wounded?"

"The steel isn't forged that will harm a hair of his head, my dear." El Sareuk looked at her keenly. "Do you really love him as much as your eyes show me, little one?"

"Oh, dear! I'm afraid I do."

"He is a man. But he is married, and a Christian."

"As for that," said Ramizail, "I have plans." She winked at the desert chieftain, blew him a kiss, and cantered her white palfrey away once more. El Sareuk shook his head a little ruefully. "Godwin may conquer the unconquerable," said he, "but there goes one small package of flame and honey which will vanquish him in the end. Allah protect them both! What a pair they will make!"

Godwin, ascending the siege castle, found Lyulf and Dirty John in conference; "John thinks the caitiff rogues—I mean the afreets—are squatting by the millions just the other side of those slick barricades, sire. They know we're on the towers. Look. The parapets on the wall are higher than those on the towers. There could be two armies behind them, awaiting us."

"I hope there are," said the King fervently. "I hope they're over there in their legions and phalanxes and regiments. I want to meet them face to face. I want to flesh my sword, and

see some gore spurt. I want action!"

Lyulf said, "We're ready when you are, sire."

"Very well. You and I, old wolf, will lead the attack here, and Dick and Mihrjan the djinni will spearhead the other. Are your knights ready, John?"

"We'll decimate the caitiff rogues!"

"Good. To the tower."

They ran across the bridges and passed through the company of archers and bit-champing Bedouins. With Lyulf on his right hand and a lieutenant of the djinn's army on the left, Godwin went hand over hand up the broad scaling ladder and topped the black wall.

His broadsword—the heaviest one—was gripped in his fist; his kite-shaped shield hung from one arm. His meshed armor covered him from toe to pate, over it was flung a bright silken cloak-cape, and the great cylinder of steel that was his helmet was crowned with a golden eagle. On his shoulder rode Yellow-eyes the falcon. He forgot the heat, the moat of blood, the uncanny nature of both foe and ally, the woman whose violet eyes had ensorcelled him; he forgot the Crusade, and the traitor Morvren whom he had left bound in Jaffa's prison; he forgot the world and its cares, and knew only that he was a man born to wield a sword and carve a path through all who rashly set themselves before him. He felt his body, all compact of rawhide and tiger's blood and bear's muscles, tauten and sing its hymn of strength beneath the chain mail. He laughed for sheer joy of being what he was, and he went up and over the wall.

## CHAPTER XVI

*For the word of thy Lord shall be fulfilled, "I will wholly fill Hell with djinn and men."*

—The Koran: Houd

**D**IRTY JOHN had been right. Crouched in row upon row of disciplined order were hundreds and hundreds of afreets, their ranks reaching from the base of the tower's barricado until the curve of the city wall hid them from view. As Godwin, with Lyulf and the djinni, came over the wall, they loosed a multitude of arrows. The kite shields caught most of them, the stout elm wood turning them easily; some few struck their armor, but could not pierce the finely-linked chain. The djinni was struck in the right arm; he changed his scimitar to his left hand and gave a howl of wrath. The three leaped down, their mailed feet smashing the skulls of several afreets, and after them came three more, and three more, and three more.

Now Godwin was the vanguard of a small troop, and he hewed and slashed without science, opening a bloody way down the center of the wide wall by sheer force of steely arm and invincible broadsword. He did not think of possible flying foemen, or of arrows that were now as like to spit afreet as djinni or mortal man; he did not think at all. He hacked and cut, cut, cut, never even parrying until his first wild and exuberant drive had carried him through a dozen files of the defenders of Dar el Baida. Then, encountering a savage ten-foot mountain of a black, he happily crossed swords and began dueling. Feinting, parrying a *coup de flanc* with automatic skill, he split the fellow's breastbone with a straight thrust and shouldered his way forward, not even waiting for the carcass to fall to the floor, but pressing it back and down with his mighty torso and then with his feet. It was tricky work, dueling with a man who topped you by forty-eight inches. He laughed in his helmet. Life, life! He was in his element.

Only the enemies before him earned

his attention. Between him and the walls' parapets were many afreets, but they must be left for those behind to deal with; he ploughed down the center of their army, and beside him were fighters of nearly equal power to protect his royal frame from treacherous attacks. To his right, Lyulf was working with a will, his blade all a crimson dripping flame in its lightning blows. "Smite, grizzled wolf!" roared the King. "Strike, strike!" On his left the heavy casque and tremendous broadsword of Dirty John came plunging up to take the place of the djinni, who had fallen headless a few feet back. "Carve the caitiff rogues, John!" said Godwin, and howled with ferocious glee. John was a raging maniac in a battle, and his heedless tactics and utter disregard of rules had given him his nickname.

Down the wall they passed, three champions from the Western Isles, and the word flew back among the packed afreetish throngs: "There comes one and two beside him whom none can halt!" In the blasphemous mosques of Dar el Baida the female afreets gathered, to send their loathly prayers down to their master Eblis on his throne in Hell. But still the champions ranged through the ranks on the wall of the citadel, slaying those in the center of the enemy forces, leaving those to the far left and right for the men who pressed after; and these were also deadly warriors.

There were men from the desert, Bedouins who had been born a-horseback and never till now had fought with their feet on solid ground; there were yellow-tunicked Mamelukes and Seljuk Turks out of deep unknown Asia, in steel-mesh armor and gaudy mantles of silk and rich cloths; there were British crossbowmen who sent their bolts over their comrades' heads into the bodies of afreets who yet

waited some scores of yards beyond the forefront of battle; here strode the terrible Soldarii, and cheek-by-jowl beside them stormed the twisted-brained and far-dreaded Assassins of the Old Man of the Mountain, armed with gigantic axes; Moorish mercenaries and gold-bought Turcomans fought forward through the press of friends to get at enemies, and now and again struck down an ally, the more readily to surge to the front and glut their weapons' thirst for blood, for all they knew and loved was war and the waging of war; and among them all stalked the deadly, stolid, towering djinn of the witch-woman Ramizail. It was a horde whose like had never been seen in all the kingdoms of the earth, before the siege of Dar el Baida. They had come to rid their land of an age-old curse, a blight which had lain upon them for uncountable generations.

AND THEY fought and died, and were struck down and staggered up again, and slew and slew until their foreheads oozed bloody sweat at the terrible exertions; and always before them went Godwin and Lyulf and John of Bartesme, a trio of vengeful steel-cased furies, reeking with the gore that splashed them from head to foot, and slaughtering everything that showed itself before the slits in their hell-hot helmets.

From the King came a peal of perfectly demoniacal laughter, for he was battling as he had never done before. Just above him circled the falcon Yellow-eyes, adding her shriek to the tumult, wary amber eyes always alert for danger to her master.

Dirty John took a frightful thump on the head from a sledge hammer in the paws of a hairy, naked afreet. Muttering "Caitiff rogue..." he dropped on his knees and swayed over to his face. Godwin made a two-handed swipe at the evil spirit and

divided him at the waist, for that moment sickened and mournful at the fate of his long-time friend. John might have had but one epithet at his tongue's command, but he had been a very doughty knight. Godwin gave a terrible roar and went plunging along the wall, with his iron sword making an arc of red-gray impenetrability before him. At that instant the afreets broke. They had held for nearly an hour, and now a wave of hysteria seemed to grip them all at once; many dropped their weapons and leaped headlong over the high parapet, to fall to their deaths on the city streets, or be impaled on the spears of El Sareuk's men without the walls.

Godwin transfixed a foeman on his sword, and the carcass in dropping jerked it from his grasp. He set his foot upon the dead chest and hauled out his blade. When he looked up, he was staring directly into the blood-shot dark eyes of his friend Baron Richard.

"Dick! Where the hell did you spring from?"

"We came around the other way, Godwin," panted Dick. He clumsily unlaced his helm and removed it. "Mihrjan here was a tower of strength with that scimitar of his. Godwin, you ought to see his back-hand!"

"Why, then we've cleared the wall!" said the King, taking off his own eagle-topped casque. "It seems we just started, and we're done!"

"It has been an hour, Lord of my Life," said the djinni. His pantherish black body was lathered like a far-ridden horse from his labors. "Time flits like a gazelle when one is brawling."

"Was there much magic adrift on the wall?" asked Godwin curiously. "For all I saw, I was fighting plain mortal foemen."

"There were spells, but my com-

rades behind us crushed them as swiftly as they appeared. You may have noticed, O Ruler of the Distant Isles, that the greater number of the afreets fought nearly naked. They constantly attempted to conjure magical armor, but my djinn dissolved it."

"It seems to me you chaps are as strong as they are."

"In many things. Not in all. We tried to cast spells likewise, but were defeated; so that in this fight djinn and afreets were scarcely more than so many stout human swordsmen."

"Now for the city," said Lyulf impatiently. "How do we descend?"

"Secret gates near the forepart of the wall," answered Mihrjan.

"Back, then, and we'll go down and force those gates. Come along, lads!" He told off some of them to succor their wounded, and to carry them outside the fortress; then they moved back through their seething, breathless hordes of alien nationalities, and came to the towers once more.

## CHAPTER XVII

*And remember when we turned aside a company of the djinn to thee.*

—*The Koran: Al Akhaf*

**R**EINFORCED by throngs of El Sareuk's men, who formed shoving lines on the island and wound up through the siege castles and over the tower walls, Godwin and his cohorts entered the secret stairwells and cautiously proceeded to the bottom, where they emerged upon the solid black pavements of Dar el Baida. They found there a great gang of afreets, this time in real armor: plate mail, of a kind not often seen among humanity at that time. Godwin and Dick tore into their midst with a whoop. At their backs were the remnants of the fifty knights, then the

Saracens, a company of Seljuk Turks forming a second spearheading thrust at their allies' heels.

They battled ferociously for a few minutes thus; then Godwin yelled to his friend, "These black devils are too tall to fence with afoot! Make for the gates! We need horses!"

They carved their way in savage desperation toward the great entrance. Mihrjan threw out a troop of his djinn in a flanking movement that forced a realigning of the afreetish force; and shortly they had reached the gates. Even above the clang and din of numberless swords on armor they could hear Hugh's sappers battering at the roots of the portals. Six feet above Godwin's head a gigantic bar lay across brackets and held the barrier shut. "Mihrjan!" he shouted. "Mihrjan!"

"I am here, O King."

"Bring up your djinn. Line 'em under that bar."

"At once!" The tall djinni's eyes were like cressets of blazing oil. He whistled shrilly, and many of his tribe shoved through to his side.

"Now!" roared Godwin. "We'll stand on your shoulders, and throw down that bar! With me, Dick!"

A dozen of them put their feet into the cupped hands of the djinn and mounted to the broad muscular shoulders. The afreets, cut off from them by rank on rank of desperate Saracens, screeched their fear and wrath as the Englishmen put their hands under the great bar and heaved at it. It did not budge.

"Harder! Throw your guts into it, you flabby old women!"

They caught the bar on their bent backs and strained, and beneath them the djinn stood firm, sweat blinding them, blood from cut shoulders streaking their chests. The bar moved up a little, and dropped back with a boom.

Arrows shot over the heads of the

embattled enemies, and though they were turned by the Crusaders' fine-meshed armor, a number of the djinn fell dead, their "riders" dropping with them. More filled up the line, and lithe Bedouins swarmed up to add their strength to the Englishmen's. The bar moved up, faltered, and then topped its brackets and came outward. The djinn, sensing its movement, slammed themselves back against the gates. The bar hovered a moment, the scores of hands slipped away, and it fell ponderously to the jetty pavements, where it split the stone and sent great cracks zigzagging out from its inert bulk.

Due to the quickness of their supporting djinn in dodging back, not a single knight or Arab was crushed in its fall.

The gates were already shivering, and as Godwin and his men leaped away from them, they came swinging inward, encountered the fallen bar, hesitated...

Then, as a hundred eager warriors outside pressed on each one with all the muscle at their command, the twin gates of Dar el Baida moved inexorably on their hinges, separated, were opened wide, showed the island beyond thronged with Saracens and English, with the drawbridge down over the moat of blood and a vast multitude of reinforcements galloping across it; the gates swung wide and clear, and down the center of the avenue into the black citadel rode El Sareuk and the sorceress Ramizail. The invaders gave a mighty howl of exultation. The olifants trumpeted defiance, the gonfanoniers came with a rush to head the drive so that all men should see their standards and be heartened by the knowledge that their leaders were in the van. Lyulf and Godwin, with Dick and Mihrjan, signaled the desert chieftain to join them. As he galloped up, with Ramizail at

his side, he shouted back to his following Mameluke slaves; and they ran forward hauling by the bridles a half dozen of the Crusaders' gigantic chargers. Godwin bounded into the saddle of his own beloved Spanish steed, and at once felt himself equal to any forty afreets who ever walked the earth or clove the skies.

"A Godwin, a Godwin!" bawled Dick from his seat on a fire-eating stallion. "At 'em, sire!"

"Ramizail," grunted Godwin through the slit of his vizor, "for the last time, this is no place for a girl!" Then he whirled his mount and set off at a rocketing run straight for the afreets' packed legions and the heart of Dar el Baida.

## CHAPTER XVIII

*By the snorting chargers!  
And those that dash off sparks of  
fire!*

*And those that scour to the at-  
tack at morn!*

*And stir therein the dust aloft;  
And cleave therein their midway  
through a host!*

—*The Koran: The Chargers*

**W**HEN THE soldiers of medieval Europe titled their finest fighters "champions," they spoke no more than the truth; for of all the ages and all the countries of mankind, these knights were the toughest, most fearless, most valiant swashbucklers who ever trod ground. Powerful to a degree that seems fantastic in a time when gunpowder has obviated the necessity for a lifetime of hard training with blade and shield; belligerent, merciless in the main, and without a serious thought except for the hunt and the battle, they lived by the sword and felt themselves cheated if they did not eventually die by it. And of them all, steel-thewed Godwin of Eng-

land was the finest, the most perfect in his gory craft.

In the forefront of the riotous charge he rode pell-mell, his legs braced down straight in the long stirrups, his torso relaxed, and his sword-arm a tautened nerveless engine of destruction. His gaudily-caparisoned Spanish charger, its forehead armored with a two-foot spike upreared like the horn of a unicorn, its steel-shod hoofs quick to trample a fallen enemy, carried him to afreet after afreet, its wild neigh bursting out ever and again like a brass trumpet. Circling about him, a demoniac fury of brown-white feathers and slashing beak, Yellow-eyes the falcon shared her master's dangers, darting in to confuse and harry the foemen, to slash long wounds in the black foreheads and blind with their own blood the furious, frightened inhabitants of the devilish city.

Ahorse, Godwin was more on a level with his opponents. No longer must he look up at them. Bellowing his war-cry, he slaughtered and beat his way into Dar el Baida.

When the first overwhelming rush had decimated the afreets and cleared much of the closest square and adjoining streets, he halted and stared about for El Sareuk. The virile Saracen was duelling with a giant black some yards off. Godwin cantered over and disposed of the afreet summarily. "Sorry to spoil your pleasure, but we've got business. I took a quick glance at this place from the wall; it's laid out in a circular plan. In the center there's a round building, a walloping big one, and they're gathered around it mighty thick."

"That is the heart of their fortress. That is what you must raze, Godwin, to doom Dar el Baida," said the Hadji, wiping his face on his flowing sleeve. "We'll work in to it, eh?"

"Yes. Take your men and spread out in that direction, to the right, till you've got a heavy force all along the walls. Then at my signal march inward. The djinn and my lads will take the left. We'll form a circle and kill 'em all. I'll leave plenty of men to guard the gates. There won't be a single afreet left alive by nightfall."

"I believe you," said El Sareuk. "*Wallahi*, what a fighter!" He went on, and Ramizail, apparently coming from nowhere, called to Godwin. "Wait, please! Godwin," she said, reining in, "there's trouble coming. I know it."

"I suppose we haven't had any so far!"

"I mean bad trouble. You may think soon that you'll never get out alive. It will be that bad. But, Godwin, dear, I want you to know that I think you will. There's something coming that I can't help you with, but you're enough of a man to vanquish almost anything."

**G**ODWIN STARED around him. The square was empty of afreets. Laboriously he unlaced and removed his helmet. Then he leaned over, hauled the astonished Ramizail to his mailed chest, and kissed her right heartily.

"There, damn it all," he said, releasing her, "I've done it. And what Berengaria or El Sareuk would say, I don't know, but it's a thing I had to do, or die. Goodbye, Ramizail. God protect you, you wild sweet little witch." He slammed on his helmet and rode off leaving her to gasp and giggle and sigh, all at the same time.

It took time to encompass the city, and time was precious; for the day was beginning to wane. No more than two hours of daylight remained to Godwin when at last his sweating captains brought him word that the armies had joined on the far side, and

Dar el Baida was completely surrounded by a heavy force some fifteen ranks thick—this time *within* its walls.

"Very well," said the King briskly. "We've got to do a fast, thorough job. Dick, Lyulf, Mihrjan, El Sareuk, you ride with me. Where's that turbulent young woman? Ah, Ramizail, there you are. I order you to wait by the gates. Do you hear me?" he shouted. "That's a command." Surprisingly, the girl nodded, and turned toward the city's entrance. Godwin blinked, and said, "When the olifants sound thrice, we'll all move inward, and not so much as a single afreet must escape. Heralds have carried the order around. Are you all ready?" They answered with deep growls and bayings, like so many hounds eager to slip the leash. He waved his sword, and the olifants blasted their full-mouthed fanfare. The armies began to move in.

They covered the first hundred yards without opposition; then from an alley's maw came a troop of black afreets to face Godwin's section with snarls and threats and flourishing of scimitars. The King set his horse full tilt upon them, roaring his battle slogan. At the same moment the din of sudden fighting rose from several other parts of the city.

It was a repetition of the earlier engagements, with the difference that the enemy appeared to realize its desperate plight more fully, and so fought tooth and claw, like tethered tigers in an arena. Constantly they started their magical abracadabra, only to be foiled by the nearly-equal powers of the djinn. Here and there one of the more adept would fly up from the ranks with a bow and arrows, to make a hasty try against Godwin or another champion; but the English crossbowmen were on the watch for these attempts, and brought them smashing to earth, often brist-

ling with shafts like a pincushion.

In the hand-to-hand encounters they were more formidable than ever. Godwin's armor was battered and hacked until portions of it fell from his limbs, and blood flowed from a dozen cuts; yet he never felt pain at all, but went on fighting like a perfect demon-thing himself.

Gradually they worked toward the center of Dar el Baida. Scores and hundreds of men died in the black gutters, that now ran red with coalescing gore. In some narrow lanes the blood splashed about the horses' fetlocks, and corpses glutted the mouths of alleys and were piled high in the squares. Yet the others pushed on.

Godwin, drawn off after a fleeing afreet, lost contact with his friends. For a short time he galloped about, peering anxiously through the slit of his vizor for the standards; then he gave it up and pounded toward the heart of the citadel. And there he found them, all ringed about the round stone windowless building that sat in sullen majesty alone in the central square. Here the last stand of the afreets was taking place, and the men who remained of Godwin's great forces were cutting them down one by one. The King rode up on his tiring charger broke through the mass of humanity, came to the front, picked his man and dropped him with a cleft skull; and the terrible war was over, so suddenly that it seemed an anti-climax, and men with dripping swords and axes turned to each other and asked, "Where are they all? Where did the enemy go?"

They had gone to Hell, one and all. Dar el Baida had fallen to the prophesied conqueror from out of the West.

## CHAPTER XIX

*There is a djinni in him....  
I betake me for refuge to the*

*Lord of men,  
Against djinn and men.*

—*The Koran; Saba; Men*

**GODWIN DISMOUNTED** and stood in front of the doorless entrance of the building. El Sareuk laid a hand on his arm.

"When you enter there," said the Saracen urgently, "you fulfill the ancient prophecy, and Dar el Baida crumbles into the dust of the ages. Take thought, Godwin, before you stride boldly in. It may be that death awaits you, though you have conquered the citadel."

"What do you say, Mihrjan?" asked the King.

"You must enter," intoned the chief of the djinn. "Otherwise, afreets from the four corners of the earth will gather once more, and Dar el Baida, which is now empty, will again become a wasps' nest, a source of terror and affliction to the men and djinn of this land. I cannot say what you will find therein. But I know, Lord of my Life, that you must enter."

"Hmm," said Godwin. "Well, all right. Dick, hold my horse."

"I'm coming too, Godwin," said his friend.

"And I," agreed grizzled Lyulf.

"And I," added El Sareuk.

Mihrjan shook his turbanned head solemnly. "Nay, Lords, for no man enters this place save only the yellow-bearded subjugator."

"How do you know?" asked El Sareuk sharply.

The djinni shook his head again. "I cannot tell how I know, but I know. It is written in my mind. The great King will vanish within, and no man nor any djinni may follow. What is to be will be, and verily there is no knowledge save in Allah!"

"It's easy enough to see," said Godwin. He flung the reins to Dick,

turned about and strode determinedly through the open portals.

As he passed under the black lintel, the falcon Yellow-eyes gave a screech and fell backwards from his shoulder. He halted and said, "What is it, thou splendid bird? Art wounded?"

Yellow-eyes flapped up into the air, attempted to gain her favorite perch again, rattling her feathers and beating her wings; but she could not reach him. Disgruntled and a little frightened, she flew to Dick's shoulder and alit thereon with a hawk's shrill curse. "What the devil?" grunted Lyulf.

"Mihrjan?" said Godwin. "What is it?" The djinni came forward and felt the clear air before his face. A worried scowl curved his brow. "By the very God, it is beyond my comprehension and experience. It is an invisible wall of force. Never djinni or afreet of normal powers reared this sorcerous barricade. Even I, who am wise in magic, cannot plunge so much as a finger into it." He spat. "Now by Allah and by Allah! Said the prophecy not—said *I* not this very moment—that only a yellow-bearded conqueror out of the West should enter the heart of Dar el Baida?"

Godwin reached back and shook hands with Mihrjan gravely. "Incredible," he said. "I don't feel a thing there. Not a thing." He patted the air. "And yet it halted even Yellow-eyes. Amazing!"

El Sareuk pushed by the others and paused at the invisible wall. "Godwin," he said urgently, "come back! Do not penetrate this evil place alone! Let the afreets repopulate their filthy citadel—it is not worth your life—no, not to smash a hundred such places!"

"Rubbish," said Godwin of England. He winked at Dick, clapped El Sareuk affectionately on the chest, and turned about and went into the

darkness, striding along with bare head erect and naked broadsword swinging, utterly and terribly alone.

Five minutes passed.

Dick, whose life was wrapped up in his master's, who lived for the approving grin of the King, alternately gnawed his knuckles and smoothed the ruffled feathers of the giant falcon, with a look of desolation on his bearded young face.

El Sareuk paced wildly up and down, beating his hands together; and when one of the rugged Soldarii stepped up to ask him some brash and unimportant question, he angrily knocked the man sprawling with a single blow of his fist.

Gray Lyulf, the old Scottish wolf, sat down on the black pavement and began to hone his swordblade, fierce worry in his old eyes.

Ramizail rode up, and Mihrjan told her briefly what had happened. She looked at the round blind building and burst into tears. Mihrjan patted her head kindly. "He is a man," he growled, "but there is the spirit of a great djinni in him. Whatever he meets in the evil place, that thing will he face and fight and conquer with the-help of Allah. By the Seal you wear, I swear it! He will return to you, little Mistress, or I will go to Hell and bring him back!"

Five slow minutes followed their lagging brethren.

**T**HE REMNANT of the curious mingled forces, some ten thousand altogether—four times their number had died to win the city—shifted from foot to foot, or sat their horses with uneasy mutterings. Turcomans who had never loved anyone, not even their mothers, said to one another, "If he doesn't come out soon, I shall break down the foul structure with my hands, thou wilt see me do it!" Renegade Syrian Franks, soft and lan-

guorous once, now rattled their swords impatiently in their sheaths and remembered the long-gone days when they had followed leaders to this land of Palestine, leaders who were not a tenth the champion that Godwin was. Seljuk Turks, who hated everything European with a bitter undying loathing, moved closer to the silent building and contemplated a suicide charge against its unseen defences, should this marvelous Frankish ruler not appear instanter. The multitude was held and shaken and fretted, all for the fierce love of the great warrior King of England.

Fifteen minutes had then gone by.

Mihrjan signaled, and marshaled his remaining djinn. "There is afreetish thaumaturgy here which I do not know," he shouted to them. "Now we are going to break it. Follow me, djinn of Ramizail—"

The earth was agitated beneath their feet, as though with a mortal chill. They all stared about them with abrupt horror. The round black building that was the heart of Dar el Baida shuddered on its foundations. The horses neighed horribly as thick cracks opened in the pavements between their hooves. Then with a rushing cataclysm of ear-shattering sound the stones of the central structure fell in upon themselves, melted and dissolved, ran out in molten, hissing streams of inky flame: and where a round blind building had stood, there was nothing but a pool of ghastly smoking black rottenness, from which arose a stench like that of the charnel-houses of Hell.

Dick dropped to his knees and buried his face in his hands. "Godwin, Godwin!" he sobbed. "Oh, my Godwin!"

El Sareuk tore off his turban and would have dived into the awful mere, had not Lyulf caught him around the waist.

"No!" roared the Scot. "He's gone, and you'll not follow him, Saracen! He'd not have wanted it! He's gone—great gods, he's gone, and the Crusade is ended in this hellish fort!"

The Manelukes raised a death wail. Ramizail sat her palfrey, her face chalk-white, her lips bloodless striving to keep her faith in Godwin's indestructibility undimmed. Then one of the knights pointed to the highest tower of Dar el Baida.

"Look! It's toppling! The whole place is falling in!"

They forgot their lost leader, all these warriors of alien races, and they leaped to horse and fled the citadel faster than any human foe could ever have routed them. Archers and footmen-at-arms raced with winged heels. If Godwin was dead, then Godwin was dead, and their grief was not so great that they must needs perish with him in a crumbling magical city. They came to the bridge and pounded across, packed so thickly together that many were pushed into the moat and hideously drowned, their lungs full of blood. Only El Sareuk and the closest friends of the King were left by the black pool, together with the company of djinn.

"Take my mistress and go," said Mihrjan to El Sareuk. "In staying is no worth, Hadji. Go!"

El Sareuk, a dazed and almost broken man, allowed himself to be led to his steed. Mihrjan ran to Ramizail.

"It may be that he is not dead. I shall remain. Go with God, Mistress."

"Don't die, Mihrjan," she said pitifully. "I couldn't stand losing you too, Mihrjan."

"I shall fly safely above the wreckage. Hasten, hasten!"

And so he cleared the square, and was left with his djinn.

"Enough of visibility," he barked. "Vanish from mortal sight, O djinn of Solomon! Follow the frightened sol-

liers, and await me on the plain beyond the fosse." They did as they were bidden. All about them reverberated the thunder and shriek of the disintegrating city.

Then Mihrjan, invisible to any human eye that might have rested upon him—though none did, for none were left in Dar el Baida save himself and the heaped-up corpses of the slain—launched himself effortlessly off the splitting black pavements, and hung in midair with his gaze riveted on the roiling liquid of the black pond.

## CHAPTER XX

*An afreet of the djinn said: "I have power for this and am trusty....*

*Taste ye the touch of Hell!"*

*—The Koran: The Ant; The Moon*

**W**HEN GODWIN entered the hallway, or entrance passage, of the round structure, he was sightless for a matter of some few seconds, for the place was murky as a tomb. Then his eyes adjusted themselves, and he could see that he stood in a smooth, unbroken corridor of the strange black material, stone or whatever it may have been, which led straight inward from the door. He girded up his sword-belt, hefted his weapon, and stalked grimly forward.

The passage wound slightly to the left, then to the right; it twisted upon itself twice, and by then he had lost his orientation, and could not tell in which direction he was going.

After two minutes of determined marching he came to a flight of steps that vanished in the bowels of the building. He was then in the very center of the place. Without hesitation he went down the stairs.

At the bottom, some fifty feet below the level of the ground, he found another gallery; and at the end of this was a door, which he kicked open

and barged through.

The murky light was unchanged. It seemed that the black stone must be faintly luminous, although it looked as pitch-black and dull as ever. He found himself in a low tunnel, down which he walked, stooping a little, and trying hard not to imagine what lay at the end of all these meandering passageways.

And suddenly he ran into another unseeable barrier, and his steel mesh armor's sword-sliced edges cut into his skin painfully at the contact.

He raised his blade and held it at the ready, waiting tensely to see what would happen.

Nothing did. Cautiously he poked one mailed finger at the barricade, to test its limits. There was no loophole.

And gradually he became aware of a toneless voice, speaking in his mind, without words, without inflection, but conveying a queer thought to him....

*Lay off your armor, and put by your sword; for beyond this point no metal may pass.*

Damned odd, thought Godwin. He considered a moment. Then, as an experiment, he took off one glove and pushed his bare hand forward. It passed through the wall of force, but the mail at his wrist was caught and would not move.

"Came this far," he grumbled. "May as well see what's down there, I suppose."

He stripped himself of his mail, wincing as his caked wounds stabbed him with aching. Then he flung his tattered silken cloak over the light cotton clothing he had worn beneath his armor, and stepped out grimly. The invisible wall caught his hand with a distinct clang. He looked down, and bit his lip. The broadsword. With a savage curse he flung it atop his discarded armor. Then he went on.

At the end of the tunnel was another door. This he pushed open

somewhat more warily. He looked into a huge room, a chamber cut from the jetty rock by incredibly skilled craftsmen; in its center was a kind of high-backed throne of black, on which lolled a very tall, very fat, very ancient afreet.

"Greeting, O King of the Frankth," said the creature, mouthing its words hideously and lisping in the tribal manner. "I give you welcome, ath one monarch to another." It chuckled. "Yeth, Godwin of England, I am the ruler of the afreeth. And altho the latht of the afreeth of Dar el Baida, I think, Yeth, I lay that fact to your door, Godwin."

"Thanks," said Godwin, moving closer. He scanned the afreet with repulsion. It was so covered with rolls of black oily fat that its sex could not be determined, though Godwin presumed it was male. Great yellow fangs jutted from its lower lip. It wore purple silk trousers and a jacket of green-thread-worked gauze; its turban was black as night, with a black jewel cut to represent a flaming torch clasping the folds in front. Godwin looked in vain for a sign of a weapon.

"No," said the afreet, sensing his thought, "I wear no thimitar, King Godwin. I can no more bring metal path the barrier than you could." It stood up, quite spry for such an antiquified being. Its hairless black face, with the frightful fangs almost touching its eye sockets, was a mass of wrinkles, strangely fleshless in contrast with the obese body. "I shall kill you, of course," it said casually. "I shall cruth you to jelly. You have much to pay for, King of the Frankth. I shall delight in exacting that payment."

**G**ODWIN STEPPED toward it. He reached swiftly for a grip on its fatty neck, and without effort it caught his wrist and flung him twen-

ty feet away. He rolled over, spat out a back tooth and some blood, and swore viciously.

"Give me my broadsword, and you take anything you like; take an arbalest, or a tribuchet! I'll fight you."

"Puny human," said the obese afreet, "I will take a very long time indeed to kill you, and afterward Eblith shall broil you over a thlow fire for thix million years. Come and be thlain, Godwin the butcher." It laughed obscenely. "I thee my prethent form repelth you. Very well, try thith." Before his horrified eyes it dropped to all fours and became a savage wolf, saber-toothed and ravening. It sprang upon him and gashed his throat lightly, so that the blood flowed scarlet down his half-naked chest. Then it drew back and became a black man again.

Godwin gazed about wildly for a weapon of some sort. The room was barren of everything save the high throne, which probably weighed a ton. He narrowed his eyes as the afreet came in again. This time he dodged quickly as the questing hands shot out, and with all his force hit the afreet in the face. It cried out angrily. "You dare!" He felt himself flying through the air again. He fetched up in a corner, his back shrieking with the agony of wrenched muscles and torn ligaments.

"Yeth," said the afreet, half to itself, "I shall hurl you about until your boneth are powder in your flesh. Then I shall do other unpleathanth thingth to you. Dog of a giaour! You have thet me back a thousand yearth. Now I must call in afreeth from all the world to fill up ~~my~~ dethecrated thtreeth and belouled buildingth." It stalked him, changing in midstride to the likeness of a reptilian-looking being, half loathsome lizard, half unnameable horror.

He drew back, huddling in his cor-

ner, pretending to whine for mercy. But his fingers played with the cords of his cloak, unloosing them carefully. He was laughing in his mind, for Godwin had found himself a weapon and a mode of attack.

It leaped—

It leaped upon him, and Godwin, flinging himself to one side, threw his silken cloak over its horny skull; jumped astride its plunging back, dragged the cloak securely about its head, and held the cloth tight about its neck, his iron fingers digging deep into its throat. He gave a fierce roar of exultation. "There, you unholy piece of slime! Try that!"

It swelled and changed between his gripping legs, its visible body sprouting fur and taking on the appearance of an enormous cat. He rode it as he might have ridden a fractious unbroken horse, always with both hands circling the neck and holding the torn silk tightly to keep it blinded. It thrashed about the chamber, now and then rolling on him, but it could not dislodge his battered body. He waited his chance.

It came after minutes of lightning changes of form and great pain to both of them in the rollings; it came when the cloak-blind afreet (at that moment in the shape of a twelve-foot wolf) staggered within two yards of the wall. Godwin leaped off its back, planted his bare feet solidly on the floor, clamped his right arm hard about its neck, and threw every ounce of strength into one supreme effort. With a mighty heave, he slammed the being's head against the black stone wall.

Its skull burst with a terrible crack, and the giant wolf sank down and shuddered, and did not move again.

Godwin weaved upright, threw the sweat and blood from his forehead with a flick of one hand, and grinned down at the carcass.

Its outlines were slowly changing. Godwin had no desire to watch the process, or to see the true form of the afreetish ruler. He turned his back and walked painfully out of the chamber, through the tunnel and the invisible force barrier, and sat down beside his armor. He blew a great sigh. He had won.

## CHAPTER XXI

*By the star-bespangled Heaven,  
furnished with towers, where the  
angels keep watch!*

—*The Koran: The Starry*

MIHRJAN DRIFTED slowly back and forth over the black pool, listening with half an ear to the crashing of Dar el Baida's towers and minarets. Already the city looked as though a dozen earthquakes had blasted it. Even the great thick wall was now dwindling in size, as blocks of the jet masonry dropped into the streets beneath. Black jewels, knocked from their settings, rolled about on the cracking pavements. Soon the afreets' citadel would be no more than a rubble of black stones, surrounding with barren confusion the roiling atramental pool.

His great blazing eyes eternally scanned the bubbling, fuming, shaking surface. In his mind was the tenacious belief that Godwin of England was not dead.

*A hand appeared above the steaming liquid....*

He shot down like a rocket, grasped the wrist, and hauled up with all his uncanny strength.

Accompanied by a loud sucking noise, the King came up from the depths, his heavy iron broadsword still firmly clutched in his right fist. Mihrjan gathered the all-but-unconscious champion in his arms, and flew to the crest of the nearest hill, where

he laid his burden gently under a tree.

The forces of El Sareuk and of the Franks had long since fled toward the sane and normal havens of their various camps and of Jaffa, pausing no longer than was needed to snatch up their wounded; only Ramizail and the old desert Hadji had waited, in company with the legions of invisible djinn. Now the girl said, "Is he alive, Mihrjan?" with her heart in her throat.

"Said I not that no steel yet forged should harm him? He but rests after labor, Mistress."

El Sareuk touched her arm. "My dear, the problem is still to be dealt with, you know."

"Yes, yes, I'm coming. Stay with him, Mihrjan. Guard him well, and don't hinder him from doing anything."

"On my head and my life be it, O Daughter of Solomon's Line!"

The sorceress and El Sareuk mounted and rode off toward the orchards of Jaffa through the thickening twilight.

Godwin awoke at last, to see the sun blazing up from the hills in a glorious hot dawning, with a warm breeze touching his face. He moved experimentally. He was stiff and sore, but whole. He chuckled. What a nightmare!

He remembered that after sitting down beside his armor he had been unable to stand again for nearly an hour. Then, arising, he had picked up his sword and retraced his steps through the corridors of the underground labyrinth, until, opening the last door, he was met by a great wave of black thick putrid-smelling liquid. How he had swum upward through it, grimly holding tight to his weapon, he could scarcely recall. Faintly he remembered the grip of a hand on his wrist, and then darkness that was no less black than the element he had

swum through....

He inspected his body. His armor, for all he knew, still lay in the passageway beneath the heart of Dar el Baida. His light clothing was ripped and ragged; but someone had cleansed it, washed his skin clean of blood and dirt and the pitchy ichor, and put soothing lotions on his wounds and bruises. He was in fairly good shape, he thought, for all he had been through. He shook his head. The crash of opposing armies and alien magics, the roar of the black waters and the screams of the dying still rang in his ears. He stood up and shading his eyes looked out toward the evil citadel.

Where Dar el Baida had stood in its sable glory, surrounded by its fosse of blood, there now sparkled a mountain tarn, clear as crystal, bright with sun-glare.

"Well, I'll be hanged and quartered," said Godwin.

And then it came over him that he was alone on the hill, and that nothing remained of his teeming forces save a few broken stone-casters, some tarnishing weapons scattered on the plain, and the hacked stumps of the cedar trees which had been felled to make their first rough bridge. The djinn had buried all the dead except for those who had sunk into the earth with Del el Baida, but he did not know that. He only knew he was alone.

"Who hauled me out of that stuff?" he grunted. "Must have been a djinni, I suppose." He peered narrowly about. "Mihrjan?" he said. "Are you there, Mihrjan?"

No answer.

"Where's Dick? Lyulf? All the others? Why, they've left me here, the dastards, without even a link of armor! What the hell do they think they're doing?" he raged. He picked up his broadsword, slanted it com-

fortably over one shoulder, and stalked off over the hills toward Jaffa, growing angrier with every step. At his side, silent and unseen, went Mihrjan, chief of all the djinn.

## CHAPTER XXII

*Turning aside in scorn...disgrace shall be his in the world.... "Oh, would I were dust!"*

—The Koran: The Pilgrimage;  
The News

IN THE early afternoon he strode into Jaffa. He had lunched sparingly on dates and a pint of fresh water, which he had found hanging from his belt in a leathern bag. The walk had removed the kinks from his muscles, and he had been practising swings and slashes with his blade for a mile. Godwin of England was in a towering rage.

He passed down a mean street, deserted because of the torrid temperature. He was making for his own house. He turned a corner, and ran straight into Morvren the sorcerer.

"Sorry," he grunted. "Wasn't looking—you!" he exclaimed, as the traitorous Morvren made as if to pass him with a haughty scowl. "What the devil are you doing at liberty?"

Morvren coolly surveyed his tattered cotton clothing, his bare feet, and his wild matted hair and blond beard. "Wretch," said he loftily, "how dare you thus address the wizard of the King?"

"Why, you bumbling fathead," roared Godwin, thrusting his sword under Morvren's long nose, "I'll hack off that moustache and make you eat it! Who set you free, eh?"

Morvren started back, narrowed cat-eyes glittering. "The King had me imprisoned, true, for some small and now forgotten offense; but he released me this morning. Who are

you? You speak as a knight."

"Knight!" howled Godwin, getting very purple in the face. "I'll knight you, you Judas Iscariot! I'll flay that dog's frame till you screech for—"

"A madman," said Morvren, hauling out his own weapon. "By my wand, a poor devil gone soft in the brain from this sun. Stand off, madman; I am a swordsman."

"You infernal scoundrel, I'll madman you! I taught you what little you could grasp of swordplay, and if you've forgotten it, then I'll puncture your weasand and let in some more knowledge!"

"Our noble King taught me to fence," said Morvren, backing and waving his blade.

"Isn't that what I just said, you dim-witted hunk of carrion?"

"Poor madman," said Morvren uneasily, as Godwin made a pass at him. "I pity your affliction. Go along, madman. I will not willingly hurt you."

"What sort of feeble joke is this, Morvren?" bellowed Godwin, attacking him with such vigor that the sorcerer began to walk briskly backwards.

"He knows my name," squeaked Morvren. "'Tis a cunning madman, and well informed. Stand back, madman, or you perish."

The King gave a titan's shout, knocked down his traitorous wizard's weapon, dazzled him with a brisk display of broadsword fencing, and ran him through the chest. Morvren fell, and gurgled, and died. Godwin wiped his blade on the corpse's cloak and stalked on toward his house, thinking evil thoughts.

He came to the cedar gates of the court, pushed them open with an unceremonious foot, and went in.

Dick and Lyulf, in light armor under Arab *djelabics*, were sitting together beside the empty perch of Yellow-eyes. Alwyn the engineer, Hugh

of Hoxton, and John of Bartesme were scattered around the marble pool. Everyone was drinking cold honey mead, and Dick was playing chess with the old Scot. A minstrel, Godwin's favorite Blondel, was strumming idly upon a gittern.

"Well," said Godwin sarcastically, as they all stared at him with blank expressions, "I see you all got home safely. I'm happy you didn't wait for me. It's so damned pleasant to walk over the hills in this sun by oneself." He looked at Dirty John, whose head was bound up in a disreputable rag. "Glad to see you alive, John," he said. "I thought you were finished when that hammer dropped you. Give me a drink, one of you ever-loyal retainers."

"Who are you?" asked Lyulf, springing to his feet. "What do you mean, sirrah, by charging into the King's private grounds?"

Godwin favored him with a long deadly glare. "Lyulf of Graeme," he said slowly, "I have just slain Morvren, who pretended not to know me. I will not ask how he escaped his prison. I will not ask you why you have chosen to carry on his fantastic jest. I will simply invite you out into the street for a fast three minutes of swordplay, at the end of which I will slice off one ear—only one, because of our long friendship—and we will then get drunk together. Dick," he said savagely, breaking off as his glance fell on his bosom friend, "what are you doing with my second-best crown on your empty noggin?"

DICK GRINNED uncertainly, but did not answer. Lyulf shouted, "Man, are you mad? You speak to the King of England!"

"What?" Godwin actually staggered as the realization hit him: these men were not joking! He looked from one to the other. Lyulf, Dick, John,

Alwyn, Hugh, Blondel. They showed in their wide-eyed gaping not a single spark of recognition!

"The—the King of England, you said?" he stammered.

"Certainly. Who are you, that you don't know *Richard the Lion Heart?*"

"Richard the what?"

"Richard Coeur de Lion, by the grace of God King of England."

Godwin's sword dropped from a nerveless hand. Dick said, "Give the poor fellow a seat, can't you see he's ill?"

"Slay the caitiff rogue," said Dirty John huskily.

"Aye, he's dangerously mad, or a clever assassin in the pay of Saladin. Let me cut him down, sire," urged Lyulf.

"No," barked Dick. He rose, stretched lazily, and walked over to Godwin. He took him familiarly by the arm. "Come here, there's a good chap. Rest here for a while. You've been strolling about in the sun, that's what's wrong with you. Lyulf," he went on, as Godwin numbly sat down, "feel those muscles. This man in rags is a champion, I'll be sworn. Who can he be? Maybe a leftover from an earlier Crusade, eh? But he's no flabby colt. He's in perfect shape. What's your name, my man?"

Godwin endeavored to glare at him, but his facial nerves would not obey his will. He was incredibly shaken. He was an utter stranger in his own court, among his dearest friends, and here was faithful Dick calling himself Richard the Something-or-other, and playing at being the King!

"Name...my name is Godwin, and I am damned well the King of England, and you are young Dick, and—what is it? What's wrong with you all? Are you ensorceled?"

"Poor devil," said Alwyn. "He's had a knock, that's what it is, like old Dirty here. Addled his wits."

"If we can cure him, what an addition he'll be!" cried Dick, slapping Godwin on the back. "He's a bull, a perfect bull, for strength, I'll wager. How'd you like that, Godwin? How'd you like to serve the King? Be my left-hand man, eh?"

"Lord help us," said the poor shat-tered Godwin. "What's happened to all of you?"

Dick gave him a flagon of mead. He emptied it into his parched throat with a shaky hand. "It's the afreets," he said, choking. "They've made you all insane. Damn their subtle magic! That's it. The afreets did it."

"Who are the afreets, Godwin?" asked Dick, in the wheedling voice of one speaking to the feeble-minded.

"Why, them we fought yesterday, at Dar el Baida."

"You fought someone called afreets? Is that it?"

"We all did, Dick!" shouted Godwin piteously. "We were all there on the wall, and Mihrjan the djinni was at your side, while I had Lyulf and John. John, where'd you get your broken skull?" he asked, whirling on the stool. "Wasn't it from a sledge hammer in the paws of a big afreet?"

"It was from a caitiff rogue of a Saracen with a mace, on the hot plains beyond the city. We lost some good men yesterday in that battle."

"You fought the Saracens yesterday?" He leaped up. "You fought beside the Saracens, and ruddy fine allies they were!"

"Hopelessly mad," said old Hugh.

"I'm afraid so," agreed Dick. "I'm sorry, for he's a brawny lad, and I feel—I feel strangely that I've seen him before."

**G**ODWIN slapped his thigh. "I have it! The afreets have changed my appearance. You don't recognize me. You think Godwin's dead, and you've made Dick ruler in

my stead." He rushed to the pool, fell to his knees beside it, and gazed at his reflection. Barring the unkemptness of his beard, and several freshly-scabbed wounds, it was the same face it had always been. He wavered there above the perfumed waters, and would have fallen had not Dick caught his shoulder.

"Steady there, Godwin! You're ill, man. Come and lie down. Perhaps the madness will wear off with sleep."

Godwin stood upright. "No," he said huskily, "it will never wear off. I don't know what's happened. I only know that yesterday we fought tens of thousands of afreets, and wrecked the city of Dar el Baida; and now I am either dead or mad or bewitched. Tell me once more, messires," he said brokenly, "tell me who this is, this dear old lad I think is no more than my friend Dick."

"This is the greatest monarch in all Christendom, and his name is Richard the Lion Heart. We are on a Crusade to liberate Jerusalem from the power of the infidel," said Lyulf.

Godwin went over and picked up his broadsword. "I would think this a vile plot to unthrone me, were it anyone save you who stand here," said he sadly. "But I know that Dick is not capable of such corrupt schemes. So I won't kill you all. I'll go and find someone who's versed in sorcery, and they will tell me what to do. Somehow it will come right. Such things don't happen." He gazed at the puzzled Dick. "Mind you take care of that crown, young fellow," he said sternly, and turned his back on them and went out through the cedar gates into the hot lane.

Behind him he heard several of them laugh. Then Dick said sharply, "No merriment, gentlemen! Unless I am mistaken, that poor creature was once a noble knight, and a true champion of men!"

Blondel struck a chord from his gittern, and began to sing an improvised tune of Richard Coeur de Lion and the strange wild madman of Jaffa.

### CHAPTER XXIII

*Surely, among delights shall the righteous dwell!  
Seated on bridal couches they will gaze around;  
Thou shalt mark in their faces the brightness of delight;  
Choice sealed wine shall be given them to quaff,  
The seal of musk. For this let those pant who pant for bliss!*  
—The Koran: Those Who Stint

HE STUMBLED from the city. His mind reeling with horror. His feet took him erratically over the hot ground, now here and now there, as aimless as a dallying wind; at last he staggered up a rise, blind with weariness and confusion, and came to a large oasis-like clump of date palms. A man stood directly in his path. Slowly he looked up, and saw that it was El Sareuk.

He collected his wits and said, "Sir, I warn you to stand away from my sword, for I am mad, and may do you an injury. I know—at least I think—that you're the Lord Mohammed El Sareuk, and several other things concerning you; but you have never seen me before, and I am nameless in your sight. I beg you to stand aside."

El Sareuk took two steps and gripped him with lean biting fingers. The dark hawk-face twisted in pity.

"My friend," said the Saracen. "My poor bewildered friend, Godwin! We never meant you to suffer so, but Ramizail finished her spell no more than half an hour ago, and Mihrjan had orders not to hinder you in anything. Has it been so very terrible,

Godwin?"

Godwin of England opened his blue eyes to their fullest extent. "You know me?" he asked, incredulous.

"Know you! I helped to bring you to this pass. May Allah damn my soul for it!"

Godwin embraced him, like a bear hugging a wolf. "I don't care a curse what you've done, old desert roamer! You just gave me back my sanity. I thought I was mad, El Sareuk, I thought I was witched into lunacy!" He laughed brokenly. "If you only knew what a relief it is to find one man who recognizes me!"

"Mihrjan," said El Sareuk, his voice rather muffled against the King's chest, "can't you appear too? Let him know he's among friends."

Towering Mihrjan shot into view beside them, salaaming deeply. "I nearly cut them to fragments, Lord of my Life, when they laughed at you," he boomed. "I could have done it with ease, so angry was I."

"Let me sit down," said Godwin. "I'm overcome. I'm baffled. What happened? Who am I, if I'm not King of England? What about Dick? How—"

"The author of your misfortunes shall answer you," said El Sareuk. "And if you then wish to kill us all, I will not blame nor oppose you, Godwin. Here she comes, the heartless young wretch!"

Godwin turned, and looked into the wonderful violet eyes of a contrite Ramizail.

"Hello, Godwin dear," she said in a small voice. "I hope you're well?"

His great hands shot out to fasten themselves on her shoulders. Even the guardian djinni Mihrjan made no move toward them, and Godwin knew that in this instant he had it in his power to slay the sorceress. He scowled into her lovely face, curling his lips in terrible rage as he realized

the import of El Sareuk's words—that all the mind-shattering horror of the past hour was because of this saucy, beautiful, subtly powerful minx of a Ramizail. He endeavored to say something virulent, to vent all his spleen in rabid, ireful words so that he would not have to tear the wench to pieces; but nothing came out except a kind of indignant splutter.

And Ramizail giggled.

He put his hands to his head and gave a passionate howl of irritation.

"Woman! Vixen! Tittering small pepperpot! How can you snicker at a time of such calamity! How can you blast a man's life to tatters and then—and then giggle!"

"I'm sorry, Godwin dear, but you looked so funny with your face all red and your eyes bulging out like a frog's. You have every right to be peevish and huffy. But please try not to look so idiotic."

He stared at her, speechless. He puffed and choked, and then he hauled her slim body up to him and kissed her soundly and long. She struggled for a moment, her turban fell off, and suddenly her arms were around him and she was returning his rough kiss with lusty enthusiasm.

**E**L SAREUK scratched his nose reflectively. "Mihrjan," said he, "you're a djinni, and more wise and skilled in such things than I, who am but a poor desert chieftain. Tell me, do you understand them? Are their twisted paths of thought plain to you? Do you tell me now, Mihrjan! How can a woman take a man's life and rip it from its accustomed ways, absolutely smash it to flinders, and then laugh in his face? And why should the man thereupon salute her with a kiss instead of a revengeful slash of his blade?"

"As for the man, O Hadji, that is easy enough: for what male is proof

against the blandishments of the fairest of the fair, even when she giggles? But as for the maiden, the Queen of my Being, well—" Mihrjan shook his head—"no man nor djinni, nor angel, nor even Allah himself, understands the mind and ways of a woman! Nor ever shall, I take my vow, until the mountains are leveled and the seas dip their waves to the blast of the last trumpeting!"

"You darling great creature," murmured Ramizail affectionately, "you do look sweet in a dudgeon. What a tantrum you were in, Godwin!"

The erstwhile King of England drew back with a heavy sigh. "Ramizail, I give up. I am, as Dirty John would tell me if he knew the circumstances, nothing but a caitiff rogue. You've bewitched me until I'm tottering on the brink of insanity, but I can't be angry with you even for that." He ran his hands through her hair, that unloosed from the turban was like a wild black flame. "Will you tell me why you did it, or must I simply follow you like a bull with a ring in my nose, mindless and obedient?"

"Come and sit down, Godwin dear. I'll try to explain everything."

He put his arm over her shoulders, then, recollecting himself, said, "El Sareuk, I'm sorry for this. I seem to have stolen your girl."

"Take her, for the love of Allah! She is a thorn in my side, though at the same time the light of my aging eyes. Go to your betrayed and much-forgiving monarch, niece."

"Niece!" exploded Godwin. "Niece?"

"Of course, niece," said El Sareuk blankly. "What else?"

"Niece?"

"Mohammed was my mother's brother," said Ramizail. "Don't tell me you didn't—oh, my, you didn't know, did you? You thought he was

my—"

"Yes," said Godwin, having the grace to blush. "Sorry. Forget it. Who! What a relief!"

"Oh, do come and sit down. You men!" said Ramizail, and she flushed likewise.

**T**HEY SAT in a circle on the earth beneath the date palms. Great dark clouds were coming up in the blue sky, but to Godwin the world was bright and wellnigh perfect again, though he understood nothing.

"Start at the beginning, Ramizail," ordered El Sareuk, passing the King a flagon of wine.

"Certainly. Well, Godwin," quoth the sorceress, drawing her knees up under her chin, "at first I intended to turn you aside from your quest for the Holy City, or else kill you all... but I couldn't do it. That's why your Crusades have been successful in the past. The power of Solomon's Seal has always been in the hands of a woman, and women are weak—" *Ha*, said Godwin sarcastically, "—and prone to fall in love; especially with big brawny stupid men with rough-tender hands and that kind of child-like innocence which you English display so charmingly. Ever since Solomon, on whom be peace, was cheated by one of his wives into giving up the Seal and its secret, the ruler of the djinn has been a woman. Why, we daren't give a man the terrible power that lies in this ring and sigil! Men have no sense when it comes to great power. You've got to admit that."

"Oh, assuredly," said Godwin, with a wry wink at El Sareuk.

"There isn't any limit to the power over men which the wearer of the Seal has, for she controls the unnumbered forces of the djinn. Only in the matter of Dar el Baida, Godwin, did I need the assistance of you, the

prophesied conqueror, and your mortal forces."

"Yes, yes. Go on. What about my present status? What have you done to me?"

"Nothing at all, dear heart. I've done it to others. I've blotted the memory of Godwin of England from the world."

"You've what?"

"Now keep the vials of your righteous wrath stoppered, Godwin, or we'll never be done with this," said Ramizail sharply. "Where was I? Oh, yes. The secrets of the East should be kept in the East; no Franks should carry home tales of such mighty wonders as was Dar el Baida. So now no one remembers that siege, save we three and the djinn. It's better that way, believe me! Even El Sareuk's men, for the sake of security, now think they fought a battle with the Crusaders yesterday. Do you see?"

"I see the wisdom of that. No country likes its darkest secrets banded about the world. But what about me? Surely before heaven there wasn't any need—"

"I'm coming to that."

"Oho!" bellowed Godwin abruptly. "I realize now! I see plainly! Without me, the Crusade fails. You've tricked me, you and El Sareuk, who I thought was my friend! I broke your afruitish citadel for you, and you've requited me by cutting me off from my sworn Crusade! Well," he barked, leaping up, "it won't work. I can still go back and tell Dick that I realize my madness, and want to tender him my sword. I'll fight as an unknown knight, with a plain helm, at his side; and we'll free the Sepulcher and vanquish the Saracens in spite of your loathsome sorcery!" He waved his broadsword angrily.

"Oh, Godwin, sit down," said Ramizail impatiently. "What a hasty tar-tar you are! Do you want the truth,

or do you want to make up silly fictions about it?"

**G**ODWIN reconsidered, and sat down, remembering the warmth of her lips. "Continue," he said, trying to sound bleak.

"I looked at my cards," went on the girl, "and I saw that as matters stood, you were doomed to die before ever you saw Jerusalem. Morvren would have knifed you in the back."

"I killed Morvren not two hours since."

"Yes, yes, but that's because you remembered his treachery. No one else does. Neither would you, if I hadn't done what I did; and he would have been released, to stab you secretly ten nights from now. I might have eliminated Morvren, but someone would have done the job anyway; for as King you were fated to die."

"I see," said Godwin slowly. "At least, I think I see."

"The cards said that you were doomed, then. So I did what I had to do. I blotted your memory from the world. Insofar as they're concerned, your friends and enemies, and everyone else save us, *you never existed*. There never was such a person as Godwin the First, King of England."

"How did you accomplish that, my iniquitous witch?"

"The Seal, dear Godwin, the all-powerful Seal. My djinn have been busy since Mihrjan pulled you out of the black muck; busy with wiping you from memories, taking your name out of histories and letters and books and monuments and—goodness knows what all! If you read a manuscript now of the recent history of the West, you'd find no mention of any such person as Godwin."

"What would I find? What about all my doughty deeds, battles, conquests, hunts, acts of royalty, laws, my Crusade? Are they all gone, too?

Have you turned back the scroll of time and changed *everything*?"

"That would be too monstrous a job even for the djinn. No, your deeds of valor and foolishness are still there; they still happened, dear Godwin."

"Then in heaven's name, who did them?"

"Dick!"

"Of course, Dick," said he thoughtfully. "Richard the What's-its-name."

"Richard the Lion Heart," said El Sareuk, "leader of the Third Crusade and ravening champion of Christendom."

"But I don't see—how—what—"

"Oh, Dick thinks he did it all, Godwin, if that's what's worrying you. After all, he always did half-think he was you. Didn't he always say proudly, 'We did thus and so'? Wasn't he absorbed in your personality, immersed in you; a sort of miniature Godwin, as I told you so long ago on the hill of phantoms? It was the simplest part of the spell to make him believe he was the King, and had done all those wild improbable things."

Godwin tugged his beard reflectively. "I don't know why I should believe that, except that I have seen him kinging it down there in Jaffa. Old Dick! Well, you couldn't have substituted a better lad."

"He'll be just as brave, foolhardy, reckless, silly, cruel, rash, pompous, fearless and wonderful a monarch as you, Godwin. He's had a good many years to see how you did things. He'll carry on. And he's the one who's married to Berengaria now, not you!"

"Good," said Godwin. "And the Crusade? What happens to it now?"

"Had I let you alone, you'd have died, and the Crusade would have collapsed. Dick will not enter Jerusalem; but he will achieve a three-year truce with Saladin. And he will go

down in history as the best-known King that ever lived. He and Blondel will one day be as famous as—more famous than—even Barbarossa."

"Blondel? Oh, never mind," said Godwin, sensing in an obscure way that he would be happier not knowing what she meant. "Well, well. So you've obliterated me, little Rannizail. Saved my life, eh? And in the doing, saved the Crusade to some degree. Well, well. I suppose I ought to thank you. I do. But it was a hell of a dirty trick to play on me, even so. Think of the blow to my ego! I'm a man without a country, without friends, without a past; for all I know, without a future."

"Here be friends," boomed Mihrjan. "Here be the best of friends, Lord. My mistress has interfered in your life's plan, only to give you a new and glorious existence as an anonymous great-thewed warrior, roaming where you list, heedless of the duties of royalty and able at will to fight or love whom you care to."

"Hmm. A soldier of fortune. A freelance. It sounds rather pleasant, Mihrjan."

"You shall embrace Islam before you are through, Godwin," said El Sareuk fervently. "Didn't I say that you and I were born to be brothers, and Kings of the World? See, I have turned my back on the *jehad*, the holy war, also. I can no longer fight the Franks, after Dar el Baida's truce."

"And this enchantress," said the Englishman, looking at her. "What of this mad sweet witch? How can a man marry a woman who's likely to blast him into splinters when he angers her? How could I ever be sure of her?"

"Oh, Godwin," she cried, leaning toward him, "you will always be sure of my love, Godwin."

"But your uncanny powers, my dear! They make me acutely uncom-

fortable. More than you know."

"Take the ring," she said impulsively, dragging it from her hand. "Without it to lock into the sigil, I'm as powerless as any woman."

"Which is not what I'd call exactly powerless," growled El Sareuk inaudibly.

**G**ODWIN put the ring on his little finger; it had just fitted her thumb. "I suppose that's better, yes," he said dubiously. "Can't you order Mihrjan and his lads about, now?"

"She has no true power over us without both ring and sigil, but we would follow her anywhere for no more than the love we bear her," said the chief of the djinn.

"Is everything all right now, Godwin?" she asked anxiously.

.. "I'm not exactly happy, Ramizail, if that's what you mean... Old Dick! Not to remember all the things he and I did together!"

"You will never be wholly blotted from Dick's memory. He'll wake in the night, sweating and shaking with a thought of you that will not quite materialize. He will always say of your deeds, 'We did this, we did that.' All your men will remember you in their dreams."

"I guess I'll have to content myself with that paltry consolation." He stared at her. She came and kissed him, while El Sareuk and Mihrjan looked at one another with sheepish grins.

"I did it for love of you, Godwin," whispered Ramizail then. "I couldn't change the pattern of the future without doing something drastic. I might have killed Morvren, but you'd have died before you saw Jerusalem anyway. Do you understand?"

"No, but it doesn't matter. I accept your word for it, my girl."

"You can still take this sigil, Godwin, and call the djinn together, and

change everything back to the way it was after Dar el Baida," she offered, looking a little afraid. He laughed.

"No, no. You show me a life I think I've always craved for—freedom to do and love and fight and say what I please. Ramizail, I think that is the height of your curious sorcery. You've peered into my heart and cunningly played on what you saw there," said Godwin. He stood, his sore and weary muscles complaining. "Well, where do we go from here?"

"To look upon the wine-dark sea," said El Sareuk, bounding up beside him, "or to cross the sand-waves of the desert. To battle with the fierce tribesmen of Egypt, or to make war in the mysterious depths of Africa. To do anything in all the broad world, Godwin, that pleases us."

"That sounds exciting," said Godwin. "By my halidom, yes, that rouses the blood! Let's be off."

"Say you forgive me then, dear," begged the girl. "I could have erased your own memory, you know, and given you false remembrances; but I thought you wouldn't like that. I took a chance on your killing me in revenge."

"Certainly I forgive you. Don't interrupt, wench, when two men of war are talking of plans!"

"There speaks a Moslem, indeed," said the old Saracen approvingly.

"I will vanish now," said Mihrjan, rising. "It is better that you travel without the visible company of one who is ten feet tall and an obvious djinni. But I and my people will be near when you need us, O Master and Mistress of my Being. *Imshi besselema!* Go in peace!" He bowed, and dwindled into a spiral of gray smoke, and disappeared.

"I have horses yonder," went on El Sareuk. "You shall dress yourself in the fine armor of Cairo, meshed steel

that was washed in liquid gold to prepare it for a prince; rich robes of silk and samite shall protect you against the sun. You will carry either your own sword or a Turkish scimitar of Damascus steel set into a golden hilt studded with rare gems. Your mount will be caparisoned to your most flamboyant taste. By Allah, Godwin, a life opens before you that will overwhelm you by its varied joys and pleasures. Man, man, but thou and I wilt be nomad brothers, as it was written from the beginning of time that we should be!"

"Old wolf, I think you're right. To horse!" said Godwin.

THEY WENT toward the place where a pool had in more agreeable seasons bubbled up beneath the palms; and as they passed under a patch of darkening sky there was a whir of giant wings, and a great bird shot down from nowhere to find a perch on Godwin's shoulder. He turned his head and stared with incredulous delight into the beaked face of the falcon, Yellow-eyes.

"Thou!" he shouted. "Thou long-talon'd cleaver of clouds! Yellow-eyes, thou magnificent bird! Dost thou remember me?" He showed the astonished Ramizail a tremendous grin of flashing teeth. "Witch-girl, here is something that your strange black magics can never touch. You may twist the memory of man, and put *Richard* for *Godwin* in every scrap of parchment and paper in the world; but you can never touch or change the blind devoted loyalty of a beast. Thou, thou, great Yellow-eyes! Thou hast given me my whole heart

again, and encouraged me to begin this new life with the swagger of the old Godwin!"

Ramizail felt her heart give a little jump of jealousy. She said, "Godwin dear, do you remember when I told your fortune with my cards?"

"Of course, Ramizail."

"And I couldn't recall what the four meant?"

"I remember."

"Well, I've thought of it. It means we'll have four children."

"What? Great thundering chargers!" he said, his eyes widening. "Does it really?"

"Allah's be the glory," said El Sareuk piously. "Four sons to follow their father. By the star-tracked heaven, what man asks for more?"

"Not this man," answered Godwin. He threw one arm over Ramizail's shoulders and the other around El Sareuk. Yellow-eyes shrieked, her feathers ruffling. "A friend, a hawk, a wife, a horse, and eventually four sons. By my halidom! The world's well lost, truly!"

They mounted their horses, laughing with joy. As they rode out of the palms, a gentle rain began to fall on the parched yearning earth. The terrible heat of the summer was doomed in that moment, and Godwin tipped his face up to drink in the rain.

"It's a sign that all is going to be better than well," he roared happily. "It's a sign to forget the past, and look forward with anticipation to whatever's to come. Trot, friends! Let 'em all forget me, back there! We're going down into Egypt! We're going to conquer the world!"

# MORE MEDICAL MAGIC!

★ By H. R. STANTON ★

WITH PHYSICS stepping into more and more dominant roles in science, it is clear that the future is the physicist's. Particularly startling is the gradual encroachment of that science upon biology and medicine. "Encroachment" makes it sound almost like something bad, but the exact opposite is the case. Whatever the magic wand of physics touches it transforms.

Probing man with machines is one of the present major operations of physics. The familiar electrocardiograph for checking on human hearts more efficiently than any man can, and the electroencephalograph for delving into the brain, are the two most prominent ventures so far of biophysics. But with the general extension of instrumentation and technique, it appears as if physics may even have a chance to dominate medicine aside from the invaluable assistance it has already given.

For example, experiments are going on in removing those curses of modern civilization, gallstones, and kidney stones, by super-sonic methods! How is this possible?

Gallstones are hard calcerous deposits which are ordinarily removed by a tedious, sometimes dangerous, operation. But if science has its way, this method will soon be outmoded. It is too early yet to predict success, but on animals the sonic technique has worked. It's simple naturally—as most things are. The bladder containing the gallstones is radiated with a blast of super-sonic radiation, sufficiently strong to shatter and pulverize into minute particles, the offending gallstones! Then they're passed out—and that's all!

It works on dogs and other animals. At present the apparatus hasn't yet been designed to try on humans, but it will be, rest assured.

This idea of using such ultra-scientific methods of healing on age-old troubles and diseases seems to come into particular prominence now. That is because the tools are becoming not only available but simple enough to be practicable.

Who knows when they'll get around to removing appendixes with radar...?

★ ★ ★

# THE SHRINKING THINKER

★ By WILLIAM KARNEY ★

TEN THOUSAND BILLION cells!—is a rough approximation to the number of elements in the human brain, all encased in a space of less than half a cubic foot! Contrasting this magnificent thinking machine with the crude calculating machines of today seems almost sacrilegious. For these are huge, bulky, water-cooled affairs which can be housed only in large rooms equipped with a million services and manned by a dozen technicians. In other words the so-called mechanical brains just aren't so hot.

But plenty of ingenuity is being expended upon them and the Bureau of Standards in Washington has come up with a computer with quite a few changes. In the first place the machine is considerably smaller due to the use of space-saving "transistors" those imitation vacuum tubes which are neither tubes nor vacuum devices, but merely tiny wires touching germanium crystals. These vacuum tube replacements, giving off hardly any heat and smaller than the end of a pencil, make the space requirements of even a machine like this one (called the "SEAC") relatively small. In addition the circuitry is simpler.

The computer also uses the mercury-tube method of memory, which involves the storage of numbers in mercury filled tubes. The numbers are converted to sonic pulses which echo and re-echo in the storage chamber and yet can be called forth in less than a hundred and seventy millionths of a second. Cathode ray storage tubes are also used. These have a "memory-recall" of less than twelve millionths of a second!

With twelve thousand transistor cells, a host of these memory devices and a complex data-input feed, this computer points the way toward the future. Especially in light of the unsettled and disturbed political status of the world, which may erupt into a holocaust at any moment, the use of this computer will be important, for it is especially useful as a military machine, capable of solving problems in fire control and other "shoot-problems" to scientific research.

We picture the soldiers of the future each carrying their portable Geiger counters—will they also be carrying a spare brain around, for the tedious work of thinking...?

★ ★ ★

# LONG BEER—SHORT HORN

*By Mack Reynolds*

He had started out for a short beer  
and ended up with a peculiar horn—which  
when filled, seemed impossible to empty!



What was happening just wasn't possible, he knew. But there it was, the horn on the ground with a steady stream pouring from it, forming a pool on the grass...



THE DUKE said, "Buddy, can you spare two cents?"

The mooch stopped and stared at him. "Two cents? Don't tell me you know a place where you can get coffee for two cents."

"Naw," the Duke said easily, "but beer costs fifteen in this town and I already got thirteen."

The other grinned. "Things are bad everywhere," he laughed, and dug down into his pocket. He came up with a handful of change. "Haven't got two

cents," he said. "Here's a dime." He flipped the coin to the Duke and went on his way, still grinning.

The Duke scratched himself thoughtfully and looked after his benefactor. It worked two times out of three. If he'd asked the mooch for a dime he'd have got the quick brush-off; asking for two cents, for some reason or other, always startled the other and a couple of minutes babbling usually netted him a dime or more. They liked it better, too, if he came right out and said he wanted it for beer, rather than something to eat, or a cup of coffee.

He shrugged. You had to have angles, a new slant, if you wanted to get on in this world.

Without taking his hand from his pocket, he counted the coins there. He actually had forty-six cents now. Not bad for a half hour's work. Of course, that didn't include his emergency funds, three dollars which he kept pinned to his shirt tail. In some towns they still couldn't pick you up for vagrancy if you had visible means of support, and three bucks was usually the minimum sum considered visible means of support.

He figured he might as well reward himself with a glass or two of beer and made his way down the street to the nearest bar, whose sign announced that it was the Norge Tavern.

He entered and sidled onto a stool. The bartender—a little sign above the cash register proclaimed that his name was Joe—didn't say anything until the Duke slid fifteen cents out before him.

The bartender smiled, as though apologizing for doubting him. "What'll it be?" he asked.

"Beer," the Duke said. What else could you get for fifteen cents?"

"What d'ya want it in?" Joe asked.

The Duke said, "Huh?"

The bartender repeated it, motion-

ing with his thumb to a wide selection of glasses, mugs, steins, even metal cups, standing or hanging behind the bar.

"What's the idea?" the Duke asked.

JOE EXPLAINED in a tone of voice that indicated he had to go through the same routine a score of times each day. "It's the boss," he revealed. "He thinks the place oughta be different so folks'll remember it and come back. He figures instead of just plain glasses he'll have a whole shebang of steins and mugs."

The Duke was impressed. "It's a good idea," he said. "Your boss's got enterprise; he'll get places. That's what you need these days." He scratched himself thoughtfully, then pointed to a large stein. "I'll take that one."

Joe shook his head, still looking as though he had to go through the same routine daily. "That's a thirty-five cent stein. He's goin' to put higher prices on the big ones or he'd lose money."

The Duke was disappointed, but his hopes hadn't been too high anyway; he'd thought there must be some angle. "Okay," he said, "give me some fifteen cent one. You pick it out."

The bartender looked over his collection and said. "Ever drink outen a horn?"

The Duke said, "Huh?"

"You ever drink outen a horn?"

"I thought you blew 'em," the Duke said.

Joe had brought forth an ancient looking brass-bound horn. It was too big to be from a cow, and that about exhausted the Duke's knowledge of horns. Joe said, "It's a drinking horn, like in the old days."

The Duke said, "Why didn't they use glasses?"

Joe shrugged. "How would I know? I mean the real old days, like in Nor-

way and Sweden."

The Duke was getting thirstier by the minute. "All right," he said, "anything. Let's have some beer."

Joe took the horn down to his taps and filled it. It didn't seem to hold very much and the Duke wondered if he'd made a mistake, or if it'd been half full of flat beer and Joe had just put a head on it; sometimes they'd do that if they didn't like your looks and wanted you to take your business elsewhere.

The bartender cut the foam off with his spatula and brought the horn back and handed it to him.

"How'dya set it down?" the Duke asked.

"You don't, I guess. I had it leaning up against a corner." Joe wiped the bar with his rag. "I guess you just hafta hold it until it's empty."

"That won't be long," the Duke told him and proceeded to lift the horn to his thirsty lips. It was good beer, very good; not too cool, but a bit stronger and heavier, he thought, than usual. He wondered if the bartender had given him ale instead of beer.

Two other customers entered and Joe went down to wait on them. The Duke sat alone and sipped his beer and his mind faded into dwelling upon the past and the present. He tried to avoid the future.

He looked into the mirror and wondered how many hours he'd sat like this at some bar, drink in hand. A good many. Too many, he thought, but took it back. How better could you spend your time?"

The Duke took another gulp of the beer and looked down into the horn. It evidently held more than he'd thought. He'd expected it to be empty by now.

He thought of how he'd started off in school, ambitious, eager, ready to seize the world by the tail and swing

it. What had happened? He didn't know exactly; undoubtedly it had been a lot of things, not just one. Graduation during the depression; several years without a job; the marriage with Helen that hadn't worked out; the war, and the years of horror and disillusionment.

And here he was.

He took another deep draught of the beer, figuring on draining the horn and getting another one. A glass this time. The horn was too much bother, you couldn't set it down.

IT DIDN'T drain. He looked into the horn with surprise, then took another deep drink—still without emptying it. This horn really held a lot of beer, much more than you'd think. The Duke scratched himself thoughtfully. He figured that maybe he'd better stick to drinking out of it; the bartender evidently didn't realize how much it really contained.

He sighed and relaxed. He had enough money in his pocket to have the horn filled twice again. By the time he drank that much beer, he ought to have a pretty good shine. He could probably panhandle another sixty cents or so later on. Yeah, it looked as though it was going to be a good day. Why, the way he'd been drinking, this horn must hold a quart —more.

He eyed the horn quizzically. The darn thing couldn't possibly contain that much.

Joe came down and asked, "Want a refill?"

The Duke said, "This isn't empty yet."

The other scowled. "The way you been working on it, I'd think it was empty ten minutes ago. You look like you're gulping like crazy, but you must just sip it."

"Yeah," the Duke said, "I just sip it."

Joe wandered off again and the Duke decided he'd better finish the horn off quick and order another. He didn't want this nosy bartender to find out just how much the thing held. He put the horn to his lips decisively.

Now the Duke was a beer drinker from way back. He remembered that time in Albany when a couple of bar sports offered to buy it for him if he could finish off a fifty ounce tankard of beer in five minutes. Well, he'd done it, and if he could do that he wasn't going to have any trouble downing the contents of this comparatively small drinking horn.

He drank deeply, took another breath, and went at it again. There was still beer in the horn. He looked down into it in amazement. As a matter of fact, the thing looked about as full as it'd ever been.

The Duke was beginning to feel it. He told himself he was drinking on an empty stomach, but inwardly he knew that wasn't it. He usually drank on an empty stomach; the alcohol went further that way. Besides, what with liquor being the price it was, he often couldn't afford to eat.

He peered into the horn again, unbelievably. Why kid himself, he'd drunk at least two quarts out of it already and, by the wildest overestimation, the thing couldn't hold more than one.

Joe said, "Something wrong?"

The Duke shot a glance up at him. "Where'd ya get this horn, anyway?"

The other scowled. "As a matter a fact, I let a guy have two bucks on it this morning. He was broke."

"What kinda guy?"

The bartender rubbed the end of his nose with a forefinger. "It was a sailor, I guess. Looked like a square-head. Said he'd be back later to redeem it; put on an act it was worth plenty. He won't come back, they never do."

JOE WIPED the bar reflectively. "He was quite a character. Had an accent you could hang your hat on. Said he wouldn't have left the horn with me if I hadn't been a fellow countryman."

The Duke took another long draught from the horn. "You don't look like a Scandinavian," he said, noting that his tongue was beginning to get thick.

"You mean a Swede?" Joe snorted. "On my mother's side I'm Swiss and Greek; Welsh and Italian, on my old man's. I can't help it if the boss of the joint wants to call it the Norge Tavern, and do it all up with steins and Swede pictures. That don't make me no squarehead."

The Duke took another long drink and stared into the horn. He was tight enough to have to close one eye for accuracy, but the level in the horn was as high as ever. He scratched himself thoughtfully.

"Tell me more about this guy," he said.

"No more to tell," Joe said. "He just gave me a song and dance about this here horn and when I gave him the two bucks, he beat it. Oh, yeah, he called it the Horn of Thorn, or something like that."

"The Horn of Thorn?" There was a clicking in the Duke's beer soaked brain, a memory from high school days.

"Yeah," Joe said. "Something like that."

The Duke asked, "You mean the Horn of Thor?"

The bartender scowled. "Maybe that was it." He looked at the Duke searchingly. "Hey, are you stewed? You looked sober as an undertaker when you came in here. You ain't one of these guys that gets plastered on one short beer, are ya?"

The Duke ignored him. "Listen," he said, "you wanna sell this here horn? I'll give you three bucksh for it."

The bartender squinted at him. "The guy asked me to keep it for him," he said slyly, "but I'll let you have it for four."

"All I got ish, I mean ish, three buscksh," the Duke told him sadly.

"Okay, it's a deal."

The Duke carefully brought out his shirt tail and unpinned the three one dollar bills. He placed them on the bar, gingerly got down from his stool, still holding the horn, and marched for the door. He wanted to get out of here before the bartender changed his mind.

### THE DUKE headed for a secluded

spot in the park, free both from flatfooted representatives of the city, and from fellow vagabonds. He found it, relaxed with his back to a tree trunk, sighed deeply, and continued to draw upon the contents of the Horn of Thor.

When he awoke in the morning, his head was splitting. He closed his eyes and groaned. How had he managed to achieve such a tremendous hangover? He hadn't been able to afford enough drink to get him that tight for months.

He could feel part of his clothing was wet. Maybe it'd rained in the night and he'd been too drunk to seek shelter. Suddenly, it came back to him. The horn! He opened his eyes and glared around, red eyed, looking for it.

There it was, leaning on its side, a continual flow of dark fluid issuing from it. He grabbed it quickly, automatically. All about him was a puddle of flat-smelling beer, gallons of flat beer. He was sitting in the middle, soaked.

It was one thing, last night, when he was tight, but it was another now. This just couldn't happen. He got to his feet and waded out of the puddle, holding the horn upright.

He found a sunny spot and sat

down to wait for his clothes to dry and to have a few more eyeopeners. He peered into the horn and scratched himself thoughtfully. It still looked just as full as when he first got it at the Norge Tavern. What a deal!

When his clothes had dried, he stashed the horn away, upright this time, beneath some bushes and made his way to the public library.

The librarian gave him the oatmeal look and some information on Norse mythology.

There wasn't much on the horn, but he found enough to bring back what he'd read in his younger days. The Scandinavian god Thor had gone to the land of the giants and had a series of contests with them. The giants went all out to show up this most powerful of the gods and Thor had had a rough go of it.

Among other things, they'd given him a horn to drink from. And he, not knowing it was a magic horn, one end connected to the ocean, tried to drain it. Evidently, the giants hadn't had much trouble putting Thor under the table. But, at that, he drank so much that there were droughts all over the world.

What the Duke didn't get was how come there was beer, or ale, or whatever it was, in the horn instead of water. Maybe the whole story had been allegory. Instead of the magic horn being connected with the ocean, it just meant that, through some device or other, it was endless in its contents. As a matter of fact, he couldn't imagine old Thor drinking water.

He made his way back to the park where the horn was hidden, on the way trying to remember some of the science, particularly physics, that he'd studied in school. Of course, he didn't believe in magic; there couldn't be anything supernatural. If it happened, no matter how strange or unbelievable, then it was natural. Maybe men

didn't understand the why or wherefore of it; but, if it occurred, there were laws of nature that encompassed the phenomenon.

Sure. Most legends, be they of dragons, or gods, or giants, or what have you, had some basis in fact. It was quite possible that an older race, or races, had once populated the earth. Who could say to what extent their science had developed? The only traces that remained of them now were obscure ruins in out of the way places of earth, and the legends that exist of olden gods with their magical devices.

Perhaps his horn drew upon some unlimited source in some other universe, or some other time. How did he know? As a matter of fact, right now he didn't care. What he wanted to know was what he could do with it. He scratched himself thoughtfully. The immediate problem was to get hold of a little capital so he could begin operations.

By noon he'd figured it out. Keeping the horn concealed in a paper bag, he made the rounds of the park benches where most of his acquaintances and social equals made their headquarters.

When he saw Duke approaching, Willie the Mark nodded, exerting himself as little as possible in the process.

"What's new, Duke?" he asked, not caring.

"You in on this shindig, tonight?" the Duke asked easily.

"What shindig?"

"The free beer."

Willie the Mark sat up, interest at last gleaming from his eyes. "What free beer?"

The Duke shrugged nonchalantly. "Not exactly free; but all you can drink for two bits. One of these here philanthropists is throwing it in the park tonight. All you have to do is bring two bits and your own glass.

Uh, . . . the two bits goes to charity."

The Duke scratched himself thoughtfully and added. "He doesn't want to let anybody know who he is, so he's letting me help him on passing out the beer." He made ready to move on. "I'm spreading the word around. If you see any of the boys, let them know. There's plenty for everybody."

"I sure will," Willie the Mark said fervently. "Anybody oughta be able to raise two bits. There oughta be five hundred guys there tonight."

**MARMEDUKE Halloway**, beer baron extraordinary, looked up from the chair he was occupying in his luxurious study and said easily, "Yes, James?"

The butler said, "Mr. Aiken, your secretary, is here to see you, sir."

Marmeduke Halloway frowned lightly. He disliked having his evenings disturbed with business matters. "Very well, James," he sighed. "Show him in."

Frederic Aiken hustled, rather than walked, into the room. He was a nervous, quick little man carrying a briefcase under his arm, and, seemingly, the weight of the world on his shoulders.

"Sorry to bother you like this, Mr. Halloway," he apologized.

The brewery tycoon yawned. "I assume the matter is of some importance, since you did."

Aiken said nervously, "Sir, it's just that I am at my wits end. Orders for your Norge Brew are so far behind that even at full capacity our present production would take more than two years to fill them."

Marmeduke Halloway said impatiently, "I realize that, Aiken. After all, I spend a full half hour at the office every day."

"But, sir, we *must* open another brewery. We *must* expand. Why, overnight, if we increase production, we

could become the leading beer of the nation, of the world! The flavor of Norge Brew is the talk of the industry. Its popularity..."

Marmeduke Halloway shook his head wearily. "Aiken," he said, "I've told you time and again, and the others as well, that I have no intention of increasing the production of Norge Brew. As things are now we are turning out a *premium* premium beer. Our prices are half again as high as any other beer in the country. I am satisfied."

He felt he had to give some explanation. "Besides, I am afraid the formula might leak out if I let it into too many hands. I want to keep the secret of its production to myself."

Marmeduke Halloway, the fabulous beer baron, scratched himself thoughtfully. "I realize full well that the thousands of barrels a week that flow through that three inch tube that leads from my laboratory, don't take care of the demand."

"Not nearly, sir," said his secretary.

THE END

## SPARK SHAVING !

★ By L. A. BURT ★

SCIENCE lags behind science-fiction in one department: it's never produced a ray-gun or a heat beam which the *sci-fi* authors are so fond of using. But before we get too pessimistic about the possibilities it's well to consider an ingenious new invention that's popped into the field and which may be a forerunner of the beam projectors. It boils down to a method of cutting very hard metals with an electric spark!

Materials like the carbides, like diamond, very hard alloys and so forth cannot be machined at all in the conventional sense with cutting tools. Instead such materials are usually formed into shape as powders and then roasted into a solid form. Or they're ground with abrasives and diamond dust. These are both tedious methods unsuitable for lots of purposes.

A Hungarian inventor has come up with a lathe-drill press combination which uses a tiny electric spark to boil away the metal in infinitesimal increments! The spark occurs many times a second and after each discharge an oil bath sweeps away both spark and vaporized metal. The result is that large or small holes, grooves, cuts of various form, may be made in the most refractory of metals and alloys as well as hard non-metals like the carbides. For soft metals the method is pointless. But for the tough babies it's priceless. It must be admitted that this is certainly an ingenious method, and it pops up just when it's needed most. Jets and rockets use materials of tremendous hardness and invulnerability to conventional tools. Spark machining is the answer.

Little steps like this one make up the multitude of minor advances in technology which lead to the major ones, like jet planes—or rockets to the Moon!

## GAMMA-RAY SENSOR

★ By JON BARRY ★

SOME TIME ago we reported on how a gadget as old as radioactivity itself, was coming back into the picture in modern nuclear science. It was the "spintharoscope" a little screen of zinc sulfide which fluoresces in tiny pinpoints of light as it is struck by radioactive-emitted particles. This device has long been a favorite for showing people the actual individual impacts of atomic particles.

Variations of this device have appeared recently for the purpose of detecting radiations. Generally the gadgets have been called "scintillation counters" and they're much simpler than Geiger counters. The government is interested in such detectors because in the event of war they make it easy for the untrained person to sense dangerous radioactivity.

A couple of Canadian scientists have improved the scintillation counter into what they call a "gamma-ray spectrometer". Sodium iodide crystals mixed with thallium iodide are placed on a screen, and form an extraordinarily sensitive little instrument capable of picking up very fine x-radiation or gamma-rays from far beneath the ground even though the gadget is located in a fast moving plane. Such hypersensitivity is useful naturally in locating precious uranium deposits as well as forming an important calibrated tool for studying the strength of x-rays. The intensity of the light produced by the screen of the counter is proportional to the strength of the gamma or x-rays striking it. Hence you know not only, where, but how much?

The "radiation wardens" of the future will surely carry something like this, because gamma radiation is about the most dangerous of all. It's like being exposed to a super-giant x-ray machine...

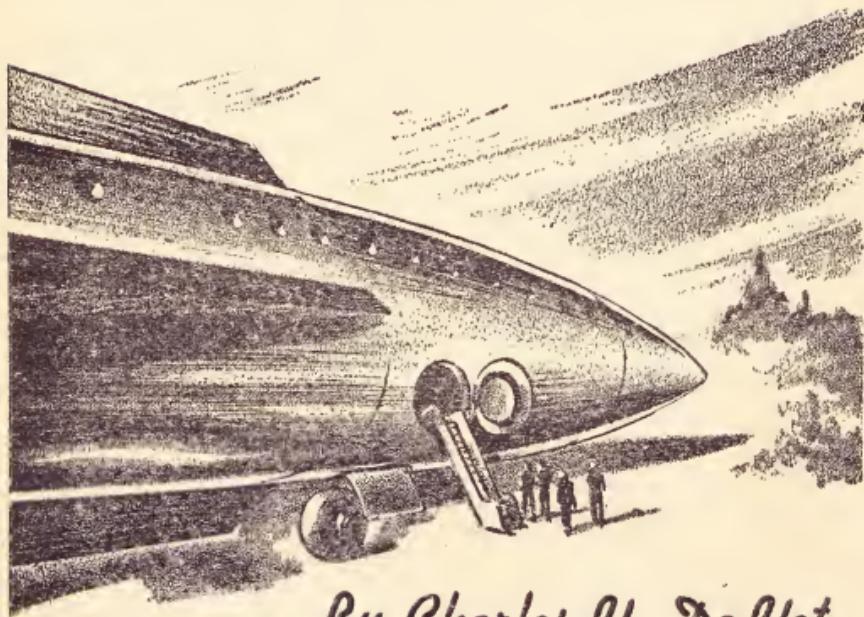
# I TAKE THIS



She smiled as she pointed to the open port of the great space ship...

# EARTHMAN

The Liieens could assume the identity of an Earthman in every respect except one: it seemed they had never known true fear . . .



*By Charles V. De Vet*

WITHIN the womb the fetus stirred uneasily. It did not realize that it thought: Its associations were too few. It knew only darkness, hunger, satisfaction of that hunger, and sleep.

Having never seen light, it did not realize that it did not see. Hunger it recognized as a want, sometimes a pain. It did not know what caused the pain or why it went away.

The body of the female was its warmth, its blanket, that often changed positions and sometimes moved. Now for the first time it understood that this blanket contained life. It was no longer alone, the only creature in its universe.

Weeks before it had felt strength come into its hitherto helpless limbs. Dully it wondered why. It had no need for the strength.

Now the flesh walls of its blanket contracted and lengthened. From somewhere came a new sensation—sound. Sound that rose to a high, shrill peak of agony.

For hours it was tossed about by the contortions of the suffering female. Abruptly now it was fighting a sharp constriction that ran the length of its body and then it was free. It cried once in fear and longing for its lost refuge and after that one time was quiet. Gradually its eyes focused and it saw the creature lying at its side.

"My son," the woman said, as she lifted him in her wasted arms.

For months the doctors had fought the ravages of cancer and to keep life in the woman's body, until the child could be born. The mother fought with them. The life she could not have for much longer she wanted to give to her child. Her blood would flow in its veins. It would live to fulfill the dreams that were now lost to her forever.

When it became apparent that the baby would live and be well, the mother slept—for the first time in two months—but forever!

The woman had not known sleep since the night she had stolen.

Vaguely she had understood what her father said about his, as yet unnamed, stimulant-essence. She knew that he had at last succeeded in isolating it from the alcohol spirits, where it had lain unsuspected for so many years, as had the vitamins in food. It was still an unknown quality, with unlimited possibilities, but practically untried.

Her father's first expectations were that it would cure insanity not caused by physical defects. He had received permission to experiment on two of the hopelessly insane in the State Asylum.

The first had reacted with a mo-

mentary cure. Within two minutes, however, the man returned to his raving. An hour later he died. Brain concussion.

The mind of the second had been unchanged by the stimulant. The reaction came in the form of violent muscular exertion. Even when bound to his bed the insane man continued to twitch and jerk. Until death came every muscle in his body, as though possessing a life of its own, suffered a continuous spasm. Medical verdict: Death by extreme exhaustion.

She knew that she must have the stimulant-essence!

LIKE A suffering animal she had stolen—that she might die and kill the maddening pain with her death. When she found that, though the drug did not kill the pain, it gave her a fierce, hard courage with which to fight the pitiless agony, new hope came. Not hope that she would live; that hope had been blotted out, never to be resurrected; but possible hope that she would be able to bear her child.

The stimulant gave her the extension of life for which she prayed, but exacted its retribution from the tissues of her body. Her metabolism burned quickly and her corporal substance went to feed the greed of its flames.

She won the race with her dying body, and as little Arthur Gabriel was born, the pangs of childbirth changed almost imperceptibly into the last flutterings of death.

When Arthur was three weeks old he could understand the conversation about him, though the muscles of his throat were not sufficiently developed for them to form words of speech. He spoke twenty-seven days later.

Through the early years of his childhood his grandfather kept him from too much contact with the out-

side world. Only he had some understanding of the intellectual capacity this prodigy possessed.

At the age of five his grandfather died and just as suddenly Arthur stopped speaking. The seven-day wonder was over and the world soon forgot.

At irregular intervals it remembered again as some tabloid reporter revived its memory. When the hundredth year had come and gone, it wondered—idly and briefly—how long Gabriel would live. And if it was true, as the paper reported, that he had all the appearance of a lad of twenty.

BY THE time Gabriel was one hundred and fifty he had become the subject of much scientific conjecture. What was the secret of his longevity? Was he sane? Just how brilliant was he? Was there any way in which he could be induced to talk; if he could talk?

When he reached two hundred, and no contact of any endurance had ever been established, the attempts were given up as hopeless. By all except a few such as Robert Becklin. Becklin had developed the most successful method of curing dementia praecox and, though the accepted leader in the field, clearly understood how comparatively little was known.

With his friend, Almer Carlson, he sat in the study of the Institute's director, Edward Gallun.

"Have you ever been able to make mental contact with him?" Becklin asked.

"Very infrequently," Gallun answered. "The last time we did, we used the occasion to give him several mental tests. He didn't seem to mind taking them, after we got his interest."

"What were the results of the tests?" asked Carlson.

"Although they were the best tests obtainable, they were too inadequate to measure his intellect."

"How did you get his interest that particular time?" Becklin leaned forward intently.

"That was the occasion of an outbreak of virulent influenza," Gallun replied. "He wrote a prescription and gave it to me. I used it on the patients and it cured them immediately."

"I believe I remember the incident," Becklin said. "Wasn't a report of it written up in the AMA journal about twelve years ago?"

"That's correct," Gallun smiled. "I believe his formula is still standard treatment for the ailment."

"Bob," asked Almer, "what would happen if we used duress, say in the form of steadily increasing pain, to force him to talk?"

"If he has an introverted mind, which we assume that he has," said Becklin, "when the pain became unbearable his mind would seek refuge in a cataleptic stupor and no pain, not even the stab of a needle, would reach him."

"Why not try a more radical treatment?" Carlson pressed, "such as electric shock or even prefrontal leucotomy?"

"If I might interject a word here," said the Director, "I believe that you are losing sight of the fact that this man is not insane. Perhaps unsane, yes. But no more unbalanced than you or I."

"That is true," said Becklin, picking up a small package from the end-table beside him. "May we see him now, Mr. Gallun? I have small hope of this experiment succeeding, but I'd like to try it, now that I have gone to the trouble of having it made."

The three men walked through a long corridor and into a small room at the end. This room was lined with

books, written in various languages. At a compact mahogany desk sat a white faced, long headed man whose youthful features expressed a calm, impenetrable serenity. He neither turned nor acknowledged their presence as they entered, and they stood silently. What secrets were concealed in that brain? What depths of knowledge had it delved?

After a moment Becklin spoke, "Mr. Gabriel, I know that our presence is immaterial to you and that our actions are probably irrational. But we would appreciate your attention while we talk. Perhaps we can interest you. Will you listen?"

Gabriel continued to gaze out the window.

"Your words are not reaching him," said Gallun.

"Perhaps this will," Becklin replied. "This may seem a bit childish to you, but I have given it quite some consideration and, if I understand anything about his thought processes, it will at least get his attention."

He unwrapped his parcel and revealed a brown mechanical case that looked like a faceless clock. A dull irregular ticking fostered the resemblance. Gabriel's head turned and he gazed down at the instrument.

Suddenly the ticking stopped, and the recording of a voice was heard from within.

"Gabriel," the voice said, "I am a mechanical humpty-dumpty. In exactly one minute I will disintegrate into my five hundred and fifty-five component parts. A skilled clockmaker was able to put me together again in thirteen hours. Can you better that time? If you can, I will have a further message for you when your task is completed."

The voice stopped and the ticking began again. Suddenly one loud tick came from the machine and it flew apart. A small inner spring flung its

components out to a maximum two foot radius.

The suggestion of a tiny, pleased smile quirked Gabriel's lips as he looked up at Becklin. There was interest and a flicker of admiration in the look.

For a moment he surveyed the field of pieces. Then he reached over, picked up one of the parts, picked up another, and began assembling. The completion of the operation required twenty-four minutes and six seconds.

The recorded voice began once more. "Congratulations. You must have finished in the allotted time or I would not be transcribing. I have given you an interesting little problem. Now in fairness, will you speak?"

For a long moment, while the captivated men actually held their breath, Gabriel glanced at the clock-like instrument, then he looked up and spoke.

**O**N THE lone planet of a red sun, following in the tail of Earth's galaxy through space, the Liieens accepted the fact that they had lost their struggle to remain on their world. Now their ship, built to receive the last few hundred of their race, was more than ample to hold all the survivors. They were ready to depart.

One billion years before, at the height of their culture, they had discovered that each day their world crept infinitesimally closer to their giant sun. The mental resources of their entire race went toward solving their problem of salvation.

For a hundred years they sought to find a method of reorbiting their planet. The impossibility of this, being proven beyond the slightest possibility of doubt, they turned to methods of counteracting the increasing heat that grew so very slight-

ly greater each year.

When all mechanical defenses they needed had been readied, they turned to a newer and more hopeful field of study—theirselfs. Each generation adapted itself well: Few individuals experienced any discomfort because of the increasing heat. Its growth was too gradual. Nature eliminated the unfit at birth, and it cut down that rate of birth, until only those with the best chance of survival would be born.

Through the millenniums they studied their auto-subjects, aiding, urging, and anticipating nature wherever possible, and changing it from its natural course wherever necessary. The culmination of their transition was reached by such little steps through the generations, that it had been completed and they were working on the next phase of their problem before they even realized that they had succeeded in the first. Theirs was no abrupt discovery like the ancient earth chemists and men of enquiry had dreamed of in their search for the elixir of life.

When they had passed the edges of their first success and had started toward their second goal, they had developed the ability to change their bodies at will: Not only the form of their bodies, but its very molecules and atoms. So gradual and so long had been their assimilation that not even the oldest of them, now for all practical purposes immortal, remembered what form or shape their distant ancestors had been when their quest began.

The second step had taken them a relatively short time. Less than a thousand years after turning to the project of space flight, they had mastered it.

Many of the last survivors had been alive when the project started. So few had been born in the mean-

time that accidental and premeditated death, the only kinds now, more than counterbalanced any gain in their numbers.

They were ready for their flight to a new world, and a new existence. A world where they could stop fighting the forces of their environment and work with it to build up their strain once more.

At the time Gabriel had been born they were finishing their last preparations for flight. The form of a liquid crystal had been decided upon as the ideal form for their Odessy. Theirs was a fluid organism, instantly adaptable. They set their bodily mechanism to near stasis, to be reactivated when they reached their destination. Their vessel, entirely automatic, rose through the atmosphere of their planet and started its flight—clear out of their star group toward a tiny pinpoint of light that would not be visible to them for decades.

**“WHAT DO you wish to know?”**  
asked Gabriel.

The moment had come and they found themselves unprepared, almost afraid to voice their thoughts.

“So many things, that we hardly know where to begin,” Becklin breathed softly.

“How do you manage to live so long, and stay so young?” Carlson asked eagerly.

“Quite simply explained,” Gabriel said. “I have succeeded in achieving almost perfect control of all my bodily functions, cellular as well as motor. Once that was done, it became very simple to renew infirm and worn out cells wherever and whenever needed.”

“Does that make you immortal?” asked Carlson.

“Immortal covers such a vast concept of time. But, as you mean it, yes.”

“I’d like to go further into that

later, if you don't mind," said Becklin. "Why have you shut yourself off from contact with other men?"

"Before I answer that," Gabriel replied thoughtfully, "I want you to keep in mind that we are discussing myself objectively. You will have to bear with me if I don't measure up to the socially accepted standard of modesty. To adhere to it would hamper my answers."

"In reply to your question. I soon reached the point where I had so few interests in common with other humans that I could best achieve contentment by as complete an isolation as possible."

"But you're as human as we are," said Carlson, "why should your interests differ so radically from ours?"

"The difference is in degree rather than in radius," Gabriel answered. "Imagine yourself living in a world ruled and populated by fellow humans with the intellect of three year old children. How much would you have in common with them?"

"But," Gallun spoke for the first time, "why don't you use your great intellect to aid them, instead of shutting yourself off from the world. Shouldn't you help them, even against their will?"

"If I may use another simile," Gabriel said, "and I'm afraid that I must use them to make myself clear: If you were born a monkey, with the intellect of a human, what would you do to help your fellow monkeys? Would they be happier if you forced or coerced them into living in houses, wearing clothes, perhaps tilling fields and working in factories, when their natural inclinations were to play and assume as little responsibility as possible?"

"Using your simile," began Becklin, carefully searching for the correct phrasing, "despite the fact that you would be a very intelligent monkey,

you would still be a monkey. Do you not feel any kinship with the rest of humanity?"

"Decidedly," answered Gabriel. "Like a mother for her children."

"Then why don't you prevent wars," Becklin continued, "or at least attempt to?"

"Possibly I could prevent wars," Gabriel said. "However, the attaining of that goal would have ramifications which would entirely upset the normal flow of progress. As I explained before, I believe the result would be subdititious."

"I've often wondered," said Gallun, "why you never spoke to anyone, if only to escape boredom."

"I am never bored," Gabriel answered. "The brain is a wonderful organ. To illustrate: I have my mind divided into seven semi-autonomous units, six of them lightly controlled by the seventh unit, which I think of as my ego residence. These seven units carry on separate researches, discuss lines of thought, and have enough interests to keep me occupied and happy indefinitely."

"Do you believe in God?" asked Becklin.

"**I** AM AS positive that there is a supreme being, which you know of as God, as I am of any fact. I am surer that there is a God than I am that I exist. I have found some slightest hint of evidence that I do not exist, but none whatsoever that there is not a supreme being. To my own satisfaction it is proven logically, mathematically, and in any form the question may be studied."

"Do you understand anything more about God than we do?" asked Gallun.

"Nothing. That may be surprising at first thought," answered Gabriel, "but I believe I can explain it with another simile."

"How much do you think the common black ant, in your back yard, understands about you? Do you think he knows anything about how you live, your sociological make-up, your sex life, or even what form you are? He probably knows of you only as a large object that crushes the grass about him, if he is even aware of you at all.

"This much I understand. God's magnitude is so much infinitely greater, compared to us, than ours is to the ant, that there is no slightest hope of our ever understanding Him. All attempted explanations are futile."

"Do you have no curiosity about what is happening on the outside?" asked Gallun. "The world may be dying for all you would know about it."

"Not at all," Gabriel smiled slightly. "You see, one of my faculties is telepathy."

There was a short, startled silence. "I suspected as much," Becklin murmured.

"I regret to say that our interview must soon close," said Gabriel. "Now if you will permit me, I would like to assume the role of prompter as well as expostulator.

"Clever as your little contrivance was, Mr. Becklin, it was merely the incidental reason for my breaking my silence.

"I see by your mental reactions, that you men are intelligent, and conditioned properly to share in a secret which must be shared if we are to save the world.

"My telepathy is sufficiently developed to enable me to read thoughts originating at some distance, if they are powerful enough. Last night at four minutes past two, I intercepted the thoughts of alien beings who had just landed on our planet!"

"My God, man," exclaimed Carlson,

"can you be serious?"

"Not only am I serious," answered Gabriel, "but they have the ability, and the intent, to kill every man on earth. I am not certain of their reason. Mostly their thought patterns were foreign to my mind."

"I believe you," Becklin said, after a moment's thought. "Can we do anything to prevent it?"

"Nothing positive," Gabriel spoke purposefully. "We have only one small chance, as I see it. In approximately five hours they will obtain a specimen of the dominant life on this planet, to study, in order to determine the simplest means of exterminating the race. I must be that specimen!"

**G**ABRIEL walked for five minutes along the mountain road before he came to the party waiting for him. He had known their exact whereabouts and even their thoughts as he walked.

They had known of his movements also, but only because of the sounds made by his progress. On the scale weighing his chances he added that fact.

Tension galvanized his intricate nervous system as he came in sight of the five very ordinary men standing in the middle of the road, waiting for him. He focused the various sections of his mind in tune with the ultramundane aliens. Suddenly a pang of alarm smote his consciousness. They, too, could read minds and were reading his as he walked toward them. Quickly he locked a wall of will about the seventh portion of his mind. If he had not underestimated them, they would not be aware that it even existed.

He experienced a warm thrill of satisfaction when he perceived that at last he was meeting his intellectual equals. His next sensation was one of fear. Would they prove too formidable opponents in the coming battle of

intellect? Would he survive it?

He was surprised to see that they readily accepted the fact that he could read their minds: They would have been unprepared if he had not been able to do so. So long had this been their means of communication, and so universal among themselves, that his ability was accepted as natural.

At first glance they had all the appearance of common enough earthmen, though he was aware of something odd about them. Finally he determined what the oddness was. They were not only dressed exactly alike, but their very features were identical.

Some feeling of outlandishness still persisted until he discerned that not only were they identical but were exact replicas of himself.

He read in their minds that they had assumed his appearance, because they could take any shape and form they wished. They had adopted this transformation as the simplest means of preventing any alarm on his part. Even their clothes, which matched his to the very wrinkle, were part of their bodies. He knew a moment of uncertainty, of wonder and doubt of himself. Could he cope with such beings as this?

So lightning fast had been these observations and exchanges of ideas that they had occurred on the instance; in the first half step he had taken toward them. From these small fragments of fact his logically reasoning mind with its split second reflexes constructed its picture of these aliens that it needed.

“YOU MAY call me Marie,” she said, breathing long and slowly on the white oval of her cigarette. Her red hair was cut short, to expose her beautiful neck, which curved gently into her bare, rounded shoulders and down into the dress line held up by the softly rising breasts.

The name, Marie, and the mannerism of letting the creamy, white smoke billow around in her mouth before she drew it down into her lungs, instantly brought to Gabriel's mind the memory of the nurse he had loved deeply more than a hundred years before. He had appreciated their incompatibility and she had stayed at the Institute three years, never knowing of his affection.

The Liien, he knew, had assumed the shape and form of the being it read in his mind would be most pleasing to him. It was imperative to them to solicit all the cooperation possible from their captured specimen.

Their studying of him in order to find the best means of eliminating his kind, he saw, was of secondary importance; they had so many ways of doing this. Primarily, their problem was to find all they could about the life of the dominant species of this world. They intended to take that shape when they assumed control. Logically the ruling species was supreme because it was most fitted to its environment. Later they would make changes as they saw fit.

“Am I beautiful, Gabriel?” she asked. Even her voice carried the lilt of Celtic melody which he had loved so well in the original Marie.

“You know that you are everything that is lovely to me.” For a moment he forgot that she was anything but the beautiful girl who sat before him. Then a morbid thought touched at his mind. What if she were not at all a female but only a neuter being in the form of a woman? Worse, perhaps her sex was male.

She smiled as she read his thoughts. “Our sex is always that of the form we assume. I am now as much a woman of your earth as though I were born one.”

He noted briefly that she spoke rather than projecting her thoughts in the accepted manner of her people.

That was probably done to enable her to synchronize her facial and bodily expressions with her speech. This was necessary if she were to depict the personality which he bore in his mind.

"If one of your companions were to assume the form of a human male, would it be possible for you to conceive a child?"

"As possible as it would be for us to conceive one in any other form. However, child bearing has become almost a biological oddity among us."

"By choice?"

"No. Somewhere along the way we lost the greater part of our fertility. We hope our new environment and the opportunity to rest from our long quest will enable us to regain it."

Gabriel turned to the other person in the room. His mind rejected the form of his friend Becklin, which the being assumed. In fascinated wonder he watched the stranger lose its individual identity of feature. Then slowly it became the replica of Francis Melzarek, famous law giver and Chief Justice of former years.

**G**ABRIEL had not been aware that he had been comparing the quiddity with Melzarek until the transformation.

"If you don't mind," Gabriel spoke to him, "I'll call you Melzarek so that I may have some means of addressing you." He had noted before that none of these people bore names. They were referred to by means of thought pictures.

"Please do," replied the foreign one.

"As we are both aware," said Gabriel, "your purpose is to destroy the people of my race. My intention is to attempt to persuade you not to do so. Am I correct in assuming that if I can convince you, as leader of your people, you can command their obedience to your decision?"

"I am only their leader insofar as I

express the will of my folk. However, if I am convinced logically, and not by any mental trickery which you may possess, there can be no doubt but that the same arguments would be just as logical to them."

"That is clear," said Gabriel. "Let me start by bringing up this question: You are assuming that you have the ability to destroy my species. Are you positive that you can?"

"Our conclusions, as to the stage of cyclical history of your civilizations, which we have drawn; using your architecture, agriculture, and such, as criteria, leave no doubt in our minds of our ability."

"Are you certain that you could so easily destroy men such as myself?" Gabriel asked.

"At first that puzzled us. We know now, however, that you are what your biologists name a "sport."

Gabriel saw the futility of further argument along this line. "Do you not have a God to whom you would have to answer for the wanton destruction of billions of lives?"

"The fundamental belief of our race in regard to that question is similar to the philosophy expressed," here Melzarek paused momentarily to swiftly probe Gabriel's memory, "by one of your scholars as 'it is just as easy for the strong to be strong as it is for the weak to be weak.' If the act is bad, as your ethics would call it, then we are still fully justified in committing it because we are too weak to do good. If it is good, we do it because we are strong. Thus we know that we are justified in any act which we feel necessary to perform."

"That is a form of fatalism, a theory which few of our men of wisdom accept. Surely it is beneath beings like yourselves."

"Not at all. Fatalism is a do-nothing philosophy. Every act of ours has its logical consequences, which we do not

accept as fore-ordained. We act only in the manner which we believe will be for the ultimate good of our people, with no inhibiting fear of punishment."

"I am not sure that I am prepared to formulate my arguments against your reasoning," replied Gabriel, "but I am positive that they are wrong, and that given time I can prove it to you. Will you grant me this time?"

"Certainly. Would you care to meet with me again tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow will be fine."

\* \* \*

Somewhere, Gabriel was certain, there was a weakness in the aliens at which he could strike. He knew that the chink in their armor must be found in their logic. They were logical people and could only be dissuaded from their purpose by stronger logic. He pondered all through the night, letting only one part of his intellect slumber at a time. While he was certain that their philosophy was wrong, he did not think that it presented his best avenue of persuasion.

Suddenly he saw, not a complete solution, but the weak spot at which he could strike. He slept, knowing that he would be ready for the interview on the morrow.

"I HAVE BEEN trying to ascertain why I have been feeling pity for you," Gabriel began. "You are a mighty race, and your intellect is magnificent. You are about to massacre my people, yet you are committing a futile crime, the fruits of which you will never reap."

"Will you explain what you mean by that?" Melzarek asked. Marie watched, with almost a hopeful look in her blue, blue eyes.

"You are a dying race," Gabriel replied, "and I know why you are dying. I may even possess the solution."

"Please continue." He had Melza-

rek's complete attention.

"I will attempt to explain by the method which we call Socratic. Do you mind answering the questions I will ask you?"

"Certainly not."

"If you found that one of your people had developed a defect, say through an accident, would you destroy him?"

"If he were a liability to our cause, of course," answered Melzarek. "That has been done many times in the past."

"What if he were your best friend?"

"I see what you mean by 'friend,'" Melzarek smiled. "None of us have 'friends,' except that we all help for the common Purpose."

"If the defect developed in yourself, would you destroy yourself or permit yourself to be destroyed?"

"Certainly." Melzarek was frankly puzzled by the questions.

"Would you be afraid to die?"

"Afraid? We have no fear."

"I know you can feel pain," Gabriel said. "If some disease, with which you were unable to cope, struck every member of your race, and you and your children, and your children's children were doomed to suffer great pain all their lives, would you all allow yourselves to be destroyed?"

"All who willed would die."

"If all chose to die, would you not be sad to have your race cease to exist?"

"No."

"Then," Gabriel drove home the thought suddenly, "why did your people bother to save themselves? Why have they spent the resources and the very existence of generations of lives to save their kind?"

Melzarek stopped, nonplussed. That great mind looked in on itself and wondered.

"That is the Purpose," he said.

"Our work. Our reason for existence."

"Is it?" Gabriel pressed on relentlessly. "Are you existing only to exist? Surely you see the absurdity of that?"

"I am existing that others might live." Desperately Melzarek fought Gabriel's thought, as well as the first doubt he had ever known.

"But you do not care if others of you ever live!" Gabriel said.

"What are you trying to tell me?" Melzarek demanded.

"That you have lost instincts which are necessary to the survival of any race."

"Instincts? Would it promote our welfare if we hated, feared, and envied as do your humans?" Melzarek asked.

"Those instincts which you mention are merely extrinsic results of an emotional nature," Gabriel replied. "The basic instincts and impulses are love, instinct of constructiveness, and the joy of living. You no longer retain them."

Desperately Melzarek reached for argument to hold his own in this struggle which he was slowly losing. "Your impulses engender acts which do not have a purpose. The results of the desires which we possess are activated by an estimate of the consequences of our acts. Surely they are superior to impulses?"

"Desire alone has exhausted your vitality and left you, in the end, indifferent to the very purpose which you have been trying to achieve. You, yourself, have admitted it."

"And your conclusion?" Melzarek surrendered.

"In your dim past, your people loved, they were compassionate, and gave their lives that others might have a life to enjoy, and not just for the sterile satisfaction of living. Your race is dying now because their emotions are dead. Your only chance of survival is to revive those emotions which

have become atrophied in your long struggle."

Swiftly the thoughts coursed through that massive intellect. Gabriel saw that, if Melzarek could know the fear of frustration, he would have known it now. He watched the inevitable acceptance of his logic.

"You said that you have a possible solution?" Melzarek asked wearily.

"You need a reintegration of these emotions to make your growth full and vigorous once again," said Gabriel. "I possess these emotions. Perhaps I can revive them for you, in exchange for the lives of mankind."

"I'm afraid that I see the difficulties of that solution much more clearly than you can," answered Melzarek. "Though I hope you will try. We intend to depopulate your earth one week from today. If you can give me proof of the emanation of one emotion in any member of the Liieens, before that time, we will leave the earth and indenizen another planet."

"Good luck, Gabriel," Marie pressed a warm little hand into his.

**S**TRONG though his purpose, none knew better than Gabriel the difficulty of his task. The reproduction of emotions needed generations of breeding. A hundred years would be too short a time and he had but a week. The undertaking would have been hopeless except that he believed he would be able to find a basic emotion in one of the aliens which was not completely vitiated.

He had been given free access to all parts of the space vessel. Eagerly he studied the minds of its occupants, seeking an avenue of hope.

First, he sought out the last alien to bear an unfit child.

"Your lost child was flesh of your flesh, blood of your blood," he addressed the Mother-being. "It's little arms circled your neck, seeking your

protection, and you let them destroy it. Do you not feel remorse?"

"It was incapable of furthering the Purpose," the Mother-being replied, uncomprehending.

"Do you not hate those who destroyed your baby?" Gabriel asked.

"Why should I?" the Mother-being queried. "If they had not, I would have done it myself."

Another alien Gabriel asked, "Do you not feel gratitude to the one who saved your life on Liileen-home?"

"I feel nothing. He did not help me; he helped our race by saving me. I contribute to the Purpose."

Gabriel addressed a third: "You are trying to develop a means of transporting yourself without the aid of a vehicle. Would you like me to aid you?"

"It would further the Purpose," answered the third-being.

"Would you be happy if we succeeded?"

"What is happy?" the third-being asked. "I only know that it would give satisfaction to all of us."

Thus Gabriel tried and thus he failed until the time of the final conference. His strongest hope he kept to the last.

AS HE WALKED into the conference room, Gabriel knew that this was the supreme crisis in the history of his world. He stopped where Marie sat. She looked up but said nothing as he bent down and pressed his lips to her sweet mouth. This was his final tribute and farewell to sentiment, and to his race, if he failed.

"Are you prepared to prove that you can revive our lost emotions?" Melzarek asked.

"I wish to make one last attempt," Gabriel replied.

"Please proceed," Melzarek said.

Gabriel turned to the alien which he had designated in his own mind

as the "weak being." He had been unable to find any definite evidence of a vestige of emotion in any of the Liieens. Therefore he had deliberately picked the one with the least strength of mind.

"Research-being," Gabriel communicated with the weak one, "you contributed many vital items of aid to the Purpose. Never, however, have you ever completed the final step. Others have always finished your work and been named for the work completed. You started as Research-being, and are still only Research-being. Do you not resent never achieving the glory of completion?"

"All my fellows know of the many contributions which I have made. I am content."

"At one time you killed a fellow Liien," Gabriel pursued.

"Do you never regret that action?" Unobtrusively he drove a thin worm of unrest into the creature's mind, and there built up an abnormal tension.

"He was attempting to thwart the Purpose," Research-being answered.

"You knew that he had suffered a grievous blow the day before you discovered his attempted thwarting of the Purpose. At the time you were undecided whether or not to report him, and perhaps have his defect remedied. But you killed him! With his defect corrected he would have contributed much more to the Purpose. You have often wondered about the justness of your decision. Furthermore he had the right to live!" Gabriel drove his thoughts with an ever increasing virility. He struck next with a thrust of savage intentness. "You did wrong! You are evil! You are damned!"

For an instant the alien hesitated, baffled by the thought and the terrific mind drive which Gabriel struck. None of the other Liieens interfered in any way.

"I have doubt no longer," he an-

swered. "I may have erred, but it is as easy for the strong to be strong, as it is for the weak to be weak."

"Is it?" Relentlessly Gabriel pounded at the Liieen's weakness of will. "That philosophy is the rock to which you cling. If it is disproved, your life will be empty. Nay, you will be a wanton thing, a hideous sight in the eyes of your very people."

"Our philosophy is true; it has been proven and accepted by my fellows. I am only following the truth that has been shown to me."

"But it was you who made the decision to accept it," Gabriel pursued. "If you did not hide behind a blind philosophy, which you yourself doubt, you would admit that you killed your compatriot not because you were weak but because that way offered less risk to yourself. You are selfish, unjust. Your sin must be atoned!"

"Yes, I was unjust," the creature quavered. "But my very unjustness is a weakness for which I cannot be blamed."

**G**ABRIEL saw that though the alien wavered, he still held grimly to his philosophical peg. With a sickening feeling of futility, the knowledge crystallized that, though the philosophy was not true, it was valid, and could never be disproven by logic. Desperately he struck with his last weapon.

"You still cling to your conviction," said Gabriel. "Because you expect to live, perhaps for eternity. But if you were to die? Now! Would you be certain that your life would stand the accounting you must give? Look at me, and see what I am going to do."

"Don't!" The creature had seen in Gabriel's mind the terrific force necessary to end his life; and the certainty of death.

"Your philosophy is false. You are going to die!" Gabriel drove home a powerful jolt of devitalizing energy.

"You are afraid!"

He watched as Research-being fought the prostrating force that punished him and the agony within. It grasped at its philosophy, doubted it, and floundered—alone. All inner certainties died. In desperate anticipation it swayed on the black verge of chaos. Another instant and devastating fear would come.

Now was the moment.

"You must meet your God, and be punished!" Gabriel screamed the mental cry at that lacerated intellect.

But the flaming pain paused, subsided, and was gone.

"You are wrong," the creature said in a voice-thought of vast relief. "Because *I am God.*"

And Gabriel knew that he had lost his battle. Research-being had another rock of conviction to cling to; one from which he could never be shaken.

Gabriel bowed his head in defeat. He had tried and lost. Earth was doomed.

"Have you anything more to say?" Melzarek asked softly.

"Nothing," Gabriel answered listlessly, weak from reaction.

"Wait!" It was Marie, and a vast stillness came as she spoke. "Can't we spare Gabriel's life? One human left alive can never defeat the Purpose."

"Why?" Melzarek.

"I do not know why," she answered. "I just want him to live."

As the solid silence held, she pondered. Then slowly her face lifted, and she smiled. A smile of dawning wonder and joy. *I want him to live because I love him.*

The Liieens stood for a brief moment, in solemn awe. Then, as one, the great intellects joined in common purpose. The giant space vessel rose noiselessly up through the envelope of atmosphere and shot out toward a distant galaxy.

...and Gabriel went with them.

# The DREAMING



Ahead of them as they ran, they could see the shattered hulk of the space ship.

# TREES

*By John W. Jakes*

**The trees had to be destroyed to make  
way for industrial expansion on the planet.  
But Thorson refused to be a party to murder!**

THE HEAVY motor lorry rolled to a stop in the clearing. Overhead a bright blue sun burned down, and from the forest all around came a muted whispering sigh.

Slipping from under the wheel, the blond copper-skinned man dropped to the ground and assisted the woman in alighting. She felt his arms on her waist, arms that were strong with the mixed bloods of Earth and High Neptune running in them. But she pushed

him away as she stepped down, keeping her face hard and unfeeling.

The copper-skinned man shrugged and strode rapidly to a small beryl steel cabin in the center of the clearing. Shoving the door open, he said shortly, "Harrison?"

Mack Harrison came trundling out, a short little man who always should have been smiling. But now he could not even attempt humor.

"Where's the body?" the copper



man asked questioningly.

Harrison jerked a thumb at the whispering forests. "First clearing, Ben."

Ben Thorsen nodded. "All right. Keep the lorry wave set tuned on the main gate. The crew is getting jumpy." To the woman, he said, "Come with me, Miss Ward."

Alma Ward followed the man called Ben Thorsen away from the cabin, into the forest of towering living trees.

When they stepped out of the blue sunlight into the dim cool of the woods, they entered another universe.

This was the forest of the Dreaming Trees, the only one of its kind in a hundred systems. Ben Thorsen owned the forest, and sold pieces of the wood from the trees, and became a wealthy man. But now he was fighting, fighting an approaching danger.

Alma Ward had been sent from Rocket City by the Ten System Population Council to investigate Thorsen's petition for leniency, which had so far gone unanswered. Walking behind him, the girl realized that she must study the factors carefully, make a wise choice, and not forget to be precise and methodical. Forget about copper arms...and the Dreaming Trees.

The Dreaming Trees were scientific oddities, but marvelously beautiful ones. Reaching some five hundred feet in the air, they had long branches that waved and drooped to the ground like tentacles. But what made them so priceless was their coloring. The trunks, and the very wood of the Dreaming Trees, changed color constantly, swirling from shades of scarlet and yellow to deep blues and greens, every color in the spectrum, and some that could not be classified at all. A small cube of wood, one inch square, from the trees, cost thousands of dollars in the shops of a hundred

wealthy worlds.

Thorsen stopped just beyond a second clearing. In the center of the open area, a small Satan Class flier was torn in twisted shapes of wreckage. The torso of a dead breed Martian gaped with sightless eyes from the cockpit.

Thorsen glanced to the trees surrounding the clearing as they modulated from a rich shade of purple into light green.

"It wasn't your fault," he murmured. Then he spoke to the girl.

"Can't you see now, Miss Ward, that the Population Council has to grant my petition? The dead man is from your work crew, isn't he?"

"Yes, sent out to survey the forest."

"His ship must have tangled in the upper branches, and fallen. The trees know what's coming. They know that something is trying to hurt them."

**S**EATING herself on a part of the wreckage, back to the corpse, the young woman took out a cigarette. High above, the tentacle branches waved in the wind against the blue sun. "You forget, Mr. Thorsen, that the galaxies are opening up. Ship after ship is leaving Sol System every day, bringing families, and the beginnings of industries. There are only a few planets whose atmospheres can support human life. This is one of them. The Ten System Population Council ordered that the surface of every one of these planets be cleared, laid bare as new homes for Earthmen. This is going to be a new Terran world, Mr. Thorsen. All the remnants of the older, primitive way of life must go. However, I still haven't come to a permanent decision on your petition that the trees be spared."

She regretted the remark instantly, from a factual point of view. But from another point of view, the beau-

ty of the trees, she did not. Idly she wondered which of the two outlooks would finally be strongest. Eventually the time to face the issue would come.

"Look," Thorsen argued doggedly, "the trees are a valuable industry."

"The Council feels that the returns will be greater if they are removed. After all, Mr. Thorsen, you are only one man."

That hurt. "The Dreaming Trees exist nowhere else in the stars as far as we know," Thorsen continued earnestly. "My grandfather discovered this planet in the early days of spatial exploration. My father worked the trees in turn, and now they belong to me."

"The Trees are alive, Miss Ward! I know you find that hard to believe. They manufacture food by plant methods, but they have a nervous system and what amounts to a spinal cord and a brain of the kind found in higher animals. They think."

"Then how," she asked almost mockingly, "can you cut out pieces of their wood to sell, if they have means of feeling pain?"

He allowed himself a reproving smile. "How can surgeons remove skin from a human and have the human remain relatively comfortable? Quite simply. A local anesthetic injected into the wood, a two foot square block of the trunk removed, and the wound bound up. The tree returns to normal, without feeling pain. The cutting actually facilitates growth. Although now we've suspended cutting activities until...this is over."

"The Council Crew at the gate," she said briskly, "can't wait too much longer. The week I've spent considering the petition has delayed their schedule. They're anxious to finish the forest and move on." Her next words were spoken very slowly. "My decision will have to be made..."

soon."

"This forest is mine!" Thorsen said harshly. "It's my life and my work. The trees are human, or at least, feeling, sentient beings. You can't kill something like that ruthlessly!"

He paused and inhaled his cigarette, arguments temporarily exhausted. The wind rushed through the sky, and the trees were changing dim shadows, exactly as the valleys of human imagination were changing modulations of limitless patterns of beauty.

Attempting to gain further support to his pleadings, Thorsen took a small black box from his belt, and spoke into it. "Bend down to me."

The supple branches of the trees about the clearing came gently down from mighty heights to touch his copper arms with a soft rustling.

Carefully studying the girl's startled expression, he explained, "Oh yes, the trees have speech. The rustling you hear. This box translates my speech into theirs."

Shaking her head in amazement, the girl wandered over to the cockpit of the wrecked flier and fumbled about, trying to remove her thoughts from the disturbing things she had witnessed. Her hand closed on a partly melted beam pistol.

"Look," she said, extending it barrel first to Thorsen.

THE TREES whipped down, screaming in a shrill sigh. Wrapping long branches around her arm, they seized the gun and threw it, and then began to lash her with their cord-like tips.

"Stop!" Thorsen shouted into the black box. "Return! She is a friend. She meant no hurt!"

Alma got shakily up from the ground. "They...know when someone tries to hurt you?" she whispered, forgetting her precise pose.

"Of course. As I said, Miss Ward,

these trees are things to love and care for, not just pieces of plant and animal pulp. Can't you see that?"

"I cannot render my decision on emotional grounds," she said, regaining her stiffness.

"Ben!" a voice was shouting. "Ben! For God's sake!"

"That's Harrison!" the copper-skinned man exclaimed. "Let's go!"

They ran back to the beryl shed. Harrison was in the seat of the lorry, bent over the wave set.

"What is it?" Thorsen called as he passed the edge of the clearing.

"The Council crew at the gates just got a message from Rocket City. Things have been delayed too long already. They've got orders to go ahead and remove the forest, petition or no petition."

Thorsen was on the high seat. He pushed the girl to the rear compartment. Harrison slammed the lorry into gear, turned it around and went tearing down the dirt road. Thorsen worked frantically at the wave set.

He could almost see the work crew setting up the Samuelson Potential Energy Release units. He could see the beams silently radiating out, until the trees vanished in a soft puff of smoke and there was only flat broken land remaining.

"Barracks," came a voice from the set. The lorry slewed around a curve.

"This is Thorsen. Get out all the trucks. Load up the men with riot guns. The crew's got orders to go ahead. I'm making for the gates. Follow me when I come by and for God's sake make it fast."

He thumbed the cut switch and dialed again. The set crackled into life.

"The Gates," said an anxious voice. He recognized Jenkins, his efficient and Versatile technologist assistant.

"Thorsen. What's happening?"

"Plenty, Ben. They're setting up

the Samuelsons right in front of the main building."

"We're coming. Use your riot guns. Fire over their heads. Keep them from working."

"Jesus, Ben," came the puzzled reply, "we haven't got trained fighters."

"Neither have they. They won't fight back. The crewmen are just doing their job. All I want you to do is keep them from doing it, until we get there. I'll try to work out something."

Again he cut the set and swiveled to the rear compartment. Alma was struggling to keep from bouncing against the iron walls as the lorry lurched along.

REACHING for a thick-barreled riot gun, Thorsen found an idea forming within his mind. A frightening idea, in a way, but much better than using the weapon held in his sweaty hands.

"When we get to the Gates, Miss Ward, go out and talk to the work crew. Stall them for a couple of minutes." His face was stabbed with terrible lines of worry. "You've got to help. Miss Ward, or..."

His hands constricted on the weapon. "...or many men will die."

"I'll keep them busy," she murmured, "for a little while."

Eyes on the road, Thorsen tested the riot gun charges. Sweat trickled down under his arms, fanned cold by the wind rushing over the open seat. "Make speed!" he yelled to Harrison.

The little man grimaced and watched the velocity dial. Seveaty. Tramping on the floor pedal, he saw the needle creep up...and up...and up....

They roared by the barracks and four trucks loaded with armed men swung into line behind them. Two more miles to the gates.

Two miles for Thorsen to watch

the trees, changing their beautiful coloring calmly, whispering their tentacle branches against the sky. The pain that would come if the Council crew did their ordered job... he blotted out the thought.

The lorry ground to a stop behind a large gray building. Beyond it echoed the flat slap-slap of occasional power charges.

Thorsen leaped down, holding his riot gun at ready, and kicked open the rear door of the building. He was through in a moment, up the stairs at the side of the great entrance doors, to the balcony where six of his men were crouching.

Beyond the railing Thorsen glimpsed the fifty-odd crew men hidden behind rocks. The truck beds carrying the half-assembled Samuelson Releases were abandoned.

Jenkins, an angular man with thinning brown hair, stooped shoulders and quick brown eyes, hurried over from the rail. Thorsen ordered the men to cease firing as the recruits from the barracks fanned out, weapons nuzzling over the edge of the balcony.

Alma Ward was outside the building, talking to the crewmen who had gathered in a small knot behind one large boulder.

"My God," Jenkins said, scratching his always unshaven face, "I'm damned glad you got here. We're no gunmen."

Thorsen gestured him silent. "Jenk, I know you've done about everything along tech lines, but I want information on three things."

"Let's hear them," the tall man said, even as he carefully observed the woman still talking to the clearing crew.

"Can you put up a force field over the forest? One that can't be broken by any weapon, and controlled by one machine, inside the field?"

"I think so, but why..."

"Never mind that. Can you rig an Air Refurnisher big enough to keep the air inside the force field pure for...any length of time? Even in an area as big as the forest?"

Jenkins chuckled. "Sure."

"And how much material have we got for food production?"

"Hell," Jenkins laughed, "with the new hydroponic trays and packaged compounds, used sparingly, enough for maybe two hundred years."

"That's long enough, I think," Thorsen said with veiled irony. "When can you have all the stuff rigged?"

The stoop-shouldered man thought for a bit. "Maybe by tomorrow morning."

"Early?"

"Yep, should be able to do it."

"Get the men to work right away."

"How're you going to keep the Council boys from doing their stuff?"

Thorsen was already down the stairs as he called back, "That's Miss Ward's job."

He motioned her over to the building from the group of workmen.

"It wasn't hard," she smiled, "with your guns poking at them."

**H**E TOOK hold of her arms roughly, and his eyes bored deep into her, sincere and hard. "Miss Ward. I need until tomorrow morning. I'm going to try saving the trees. No one will get hurt. But I need until tomorrow morning. Can you keep them from their work that long?"

Alma Ward realized that now she must decide. She felt the rush of devotion to the Dreaming Trees that poured from Ben Thorsen. And beside it, in the uncompromising light of the blue sun, her own methodical consideration and the methodical ravaging on the part of the Council

seemed, in this case, utterly wrong.

Beyond the man, the trees made sibilant talk and moved their branches and flowed with infinite coloration.

"I'll try," she said, knowing that she did it more for Thorsen than for the trees.

In turn, he felt that he was compelled to be honest with her. No trickery would ever be satisfactory. The victory, if it came at all, had to be honestly won.

"If I succeed, Miss Ward, you won't have to worry about the petition."

Without a word she returned to the crew outside the gates. There was a brief conference, and she was back.

Thorsen waited eagerly, and when her reply came, it was like a cool and peaceful breath of wind. "They'll hold off till morning. I've got some authority with the Council, and an officer here is a bit more powerful than one in Rocket City. They don't really care if they do the job or not...."

He wasn't listening to the last. "Go back to them, and stay till dawn."

He vanished inside the gray building.

In the dirt-floored chamber within the entrance gates, Thorsen was gathering his men.

"We're going to be working hard all night," he said loudly. "Jenkins is in charge. Do what ever he tells you. Tonight you work for him. Let's get started."

Jenkins began bawling orders to the men, remarkably energetic orders from one so apparently quiet.

"...and tell the cook to make ten gallons of coffee!" Jenkins finished.

"What do you want me to do?" Thorsen said.

DAWN CAME like an icy blue eye slowly opening. As the sun crept over the northern horizon, Thorsen drained his final cup of coffee. The

night of frantic work was done.

On one part of the dirt floor stood the force field generator, large red handle elevated to the Off position. In another section of the building, the Air Refurnisher waited in metallic silence, wired to begin functioning the moment the force field was erected. Behind the gray building were piled bales of hydroponic compounds.

Thorsen's men, Jenkins included, sat on the floor, smoking, drinking coffee, and telling dirty jokes. But there was not much laughter. Even the jovial Harrison's grin was sickly. They had all seen something in Thorsen's face that told them not to laugh.

The copper-skinned man observed Alma Ward hurrying toward the gates. The work crew was up, finished with breakfast and preparing to work with the Samuelsons. Only a little while remained.

Thorsen asked for quiet. The noise stopped.

"You know," Thorsen explained, "what the Council is trying to do in regard to the Trees. I'm going to prevent that, if I can. I have to let you men go. You've all been fine workers, and Jenkins will give you two months' advance pay until you get settled." He indicated where the angular man sat propped against a large blue-cloth bag.

"He'll pay you, and you can hitch the shuttle jet back to Rocket City. I haven't got a lot of time for speech-making." Rapidly, he outlined his plan.

They just sat there, scuffing their shoes and making little whorls of dust. Coffee slosh-sloshed in their cups. For in their own way, they had grown to love the trees. The trees were more than a job, more than a way to make money.

Alma appeared inside the gates, and Thorsen drew her aside. They

stepped into an adjacent room that still bore marks of the previous night, in scattered pieces of equipment and a large urn full of dark brown coffee grounds.

Thorsen explained his course of action. When he finished, her face held a stunned expression.

"You'd do that?" she whispered.

"Yes, I would. The trees deserve life."

"But can you be sure?"

"I know the Council will reverse its decision," he said, adding in what seemed a hollow and wind-echoing voice, "sometime."

She kept her hand tightly clenched on the edge of the coffee urn, and spoke with deliberation, as if her thoughts were confused and slow in coming.

"I won't cause trouble, because I think...I think you're right. It's rather mixed up, I'm afraid. I can't feel the same affection for the trees that you do, but I think that affection is...right and proper."

He touched her hand cautiously. "You could learn to love them, Alma, in time."

He hoped terribly that she would stay, but a great part of him had already resigned itself to the fact that she would not.

Her dark hair undulated gently as she shook her head.

"I can't. I love the worlds of space, and not the trees." Sorrow edged faintly into her tone.

"We'd better go," he said with forced sternness.

As he was moving to the door she put her hand on his face and he turned. She kissed him.

She didn't cry as she pulled away, but the sorrow came rushing up in her voice. "I love you, Ben, but I love the worlds of space, and not the trees..."

HE EASED the door open, observing the Council workers beyond the gates. They were climbing into the truck beds, approaching the Samuelsons.

"All right," he said to the men, "move."

In a body, they rose and walked briskly through the gates, not looking back. Alma followed.

Thorsen wished he could have slapped their backs and shook their hands and said goodbye to them all, one by one, but time was running out.

Jenkins, walking away, seemed more stooped than ever as he carried the blue bag full of money. Harrison's humor was gone. Alma's steps now were funeral slow.

The Council crew was gaping at the exodus, puzzled. Thorsen moved to the generator. His hand halted for a moment on the lever. Call Alma, he thought wildly, call her, tell her you'll go with her.

But he remembered the trees, much more important than all the worlds of space.

He yanked the red lever all the way down.

Beyond the gates there was a rippling hiss and a transparent curtain of force rose and covered the Dreaming Trees like an inverted bowl.

Ben Thorsen was alone.

The clearing crew realized what had happened. They turned on the Samuelsons, but the wall did not waver. They rushed forward with the frenzy of men fighting for their jobs and their livelihood, beating futilely on the invisible wall. They even tried ramming a truck against it. When the headlights cracked into star patterns of white crystal, they stopped trying.

Nothing could break the force field, no bombs or fission rays or mammoth pressors, until Ben Thorsen lifted the red lever. And he would not lift it until the people of the unfolding star

empires came to him and said that the trees might live unmolested. For Thorsen knew his dream was right. Like right dreams, it would be accepted by the plodding masses of humanity with monumental slowness. But it would be accepted!

He was prepared to wait. The air in the building already had a sharp artificial tang. The Refurnisher would function for years to come. And his hydroponic trays would make sufficient food.

The Council workers were getting into their trucks, leaving the Samuelsons deserted tangles of machinery on the ground. Thorsen's men climbed in among them. Their enmity had disappeared.

Moving to the very edge of the field, until he could feel a faint tingling on his naked arms, Thorsen saw Alma Ward being helped up into the

high truck bed. He thought she was crying, but he couldn't be sure. Her mouth moved, though. He studied it as the trucks pulled away. And suddenly he saw that she was saying, "I'll be back," over and over and over.

The trucks were gone, and dust clouds floated on the blue sun.

Thorsen strolled through the building. The Dreaming Trees bent down their branches as he moved among them, and their colors changed in joyful patterns, dappled with the sunlight.

And he knew, with great certainty, that he would not have many years to wait. For Alma or the people. He walked on, going nowhere, but vibrantly proud of every path he trod. This was home.

The forest whispered welcome.

THE END

## CHALK ONE UP!

★ BY LESLIE PHELPS ★

SAYING THAT the time isn't far off when a rocket, unmanned and radio-guided will be sent to the Moon is like repeating an old refrain, over and over again. It's another case of "just around the corner". But don't give up. Rocket research is on too large a scale not to result in some concrete results. After all it's only a matter of a couple or three years since the first radar pulse was bounced off the glowing Old Girl's surface. The rocketeers are on their way.

A lot of study has been devoted to the problem of determining just how the arrival of a remote controlled Moon rocket might be indicated. Naturally radar will follow the tiny vessel as far as possible, but unless there is a considerable improvement in radar equipment it doesn't appear that this is too hopeful a project. At least not for the actual detection. Optical telescopes will be able to follow the brilliant shining rocket for a certain time, to the limit of their resolving power, but even they are not sensitive enough to detect a silvery body, very narrow and less than a hundred feet long.

Consequently other solutions have been proposed, much simpler and much more effective. The first one that received any attention many years ago when the prob-

lem was first considered, was the idea of exploding the rocket in a flare of liquid oxygen and magnesium powder, or perhaps just setting off a relatively small charge of such or similar materials. The flash could easily be observed and photographed, and undoubtedly this will be done.

Later solutions are so simple that one wonders why they weren't thought of at once. The albedo (the reflectivity) of the Moon's surface is about point oh seven. This means it reflects seven hundredths of the light falling on it. If a patch of the Moon was covered with a material with greater reflectivity a permanent mark could be made.

Presto! The landing or crashing remote controlled rocket scatters by explosive a small amount of a material like ordinary chalk or plaster! The result is a brilliant white permanent mark. Or carbon black or graphite could be used with reverse results giving a dark black mark! Everybody'd be able to spot something like that!

We imagine this will have to be done with some limitations, because if too many rockets are sent up with the same marking technique the surface of the Moon would soon look like a blotched and spoiled skin...



# EVIL SURROUNDS US . . .

★ By A. T. KEDZIE ★

**N**EWSPAPERS have been blurbing recently a grim, macabre story which sends shudders into the minds and hearts of every reader. It concerns a young man who has confessed to an astounding series of crimes ranging from those of sheer anger and passion to psychological oddities that would raise the hair on the neck of the calmest person.

He has confessed it is said, to committing his first murder at the age of eight and thereafter he performed a steady series of criminal acts ranging from murder and assault to the incredible mass execution of more than a hundred people in a dreadful circus fire.

Reading and understanding that these things can happen with police and protective agents completely unaware of such abnormalities makes one suspicious of the very air he breathes. The popular figure of a radio crime hunter, the Shadow, used to ask, "...who knows what evil lurks in the minds and hearts of men?..." No better phrase could capture the attitude of any normal person reading of these

weird variations, these striking examples of psychological variants?

Jokingly people often remark that so and so should have his head examined. They may be righter than they think. In view of the alarming criminal acts seeming to come out of the times with their high-pressured living, it might not be a bad idea to have everyone examined for such deviations from the norm. It wouldn't be surprising at all to discover that such an examination might uncover acts and events which are now unsuspected.

It has been suggested that the future will see a great deal of this sort of thing, stemming in a way from the enormous number of examinations required now to get almost any kind of a job. And frequently these present examinations disclose startling facts about the examinees. This is not to imply that everyone is crime-prone, but unquestionably a great deal of unsuspected evil surrounds us. Protect us from "ghoulies and ghosties, and things that go boomp i' the night..."

★ ★ ★

# PACKAGED POWER!

★ By MILTON MATTHEW ★

**I**F YOU have a tendency to observe trends—and a lot of people have!—perhaps you've noticed a general trend toward the principle of "packaging". Of course it's very common. Nowadays you can buy almost anything in a package of some sort. Fruits, vegetables, meats, nuts, bolts, alcohol, oil—practically anything in the animal or vegetable kingdoms are found this way. And the trend is continually toward more complete packaging. They even sell complete bathrooms and kitchens in "packaged" units. The efficiency and economy of construction are clear.

In general, packaging is being adopted in industry on a tremendous scale and it points an important moral for the future—every man his own mechanic. For example, military radio and radar equipment is so built in a series of plug-in, packaged units, that when trouble occurs, the offending unit may be found and discarded by merely a series of tests of replacements with new units. Plug in the new one and if it works—O.K. Such a simple principle makes it not only possible but practicable as well, to employ terribly complex gadgets because they can be so easily repaired in case of trouble.

Another example, not yet factual, but on its way, is the idea of the packaged motor

for automobiles etc. If trouble develops in the motor, don't bother to trouble-shoot it. Instead rip it out and put in a new motor. Then the old one can be dismantled and rebuilt or repaired at the factory or at one's leisure. Airlines and the Air Force employ this technique and so do bus and truck companies. Eventually ordinary cars will utilize it too.

Thus we see a definite movement toward simplifying the enormous complexities of our times. The average man can become his own mechanic when repair is simply a matter of replacement. On American farms, this self-repair and self-replacement is widely employed.

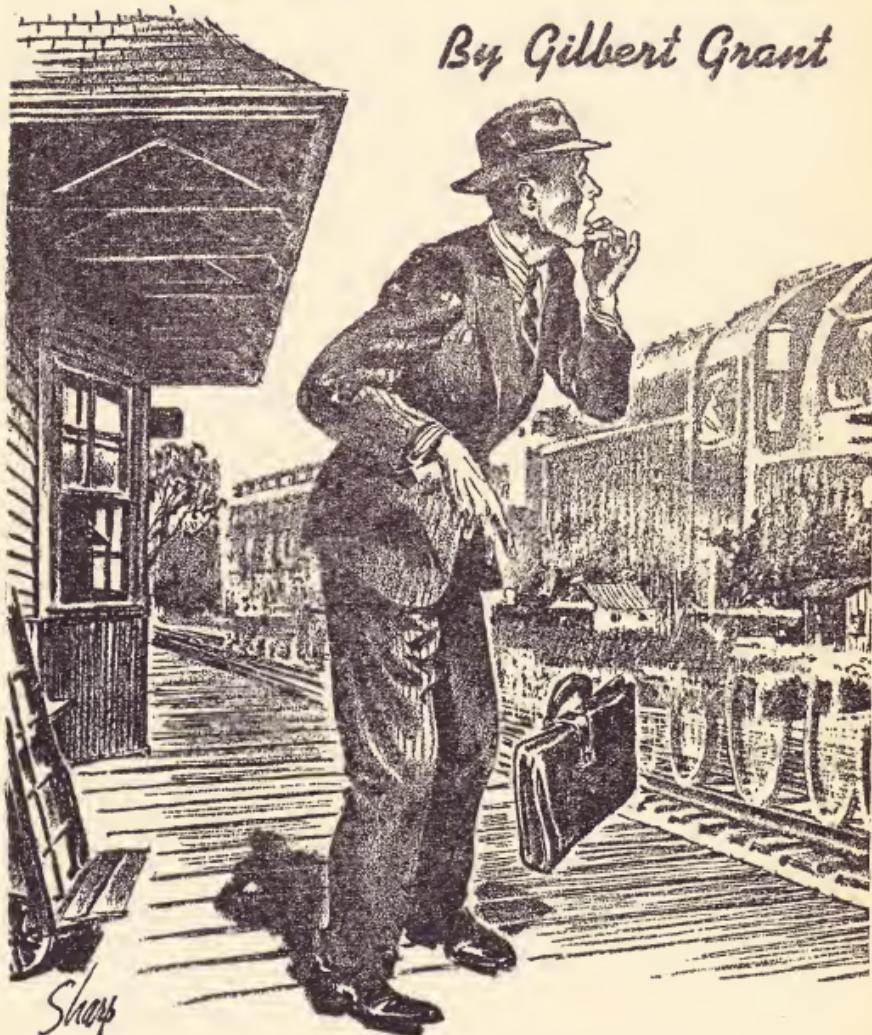
We can get a minor glimpse then into the future from these observations. Certainly the gadgets and mechanisms of everyday life, which will be infinitely more complicated than today's, will keep at peak performance by the package replacement idea. And perhaps this indicates that the average man, instead of becoming more inept and incapable of working with tools, will become more able to handle his own repair jobs. When the three-dimensional video goes out—bingo, slap in new plug-in units until it works! The helicopter on the fritz?—bingo, try a new motor—it only takes four bolts to do it!

★ ★ ★

# ONE WAY...

He had a quarter of a million dollars  
in the brief case, and all of his troubles had  
been left behind him — even more than he knew!

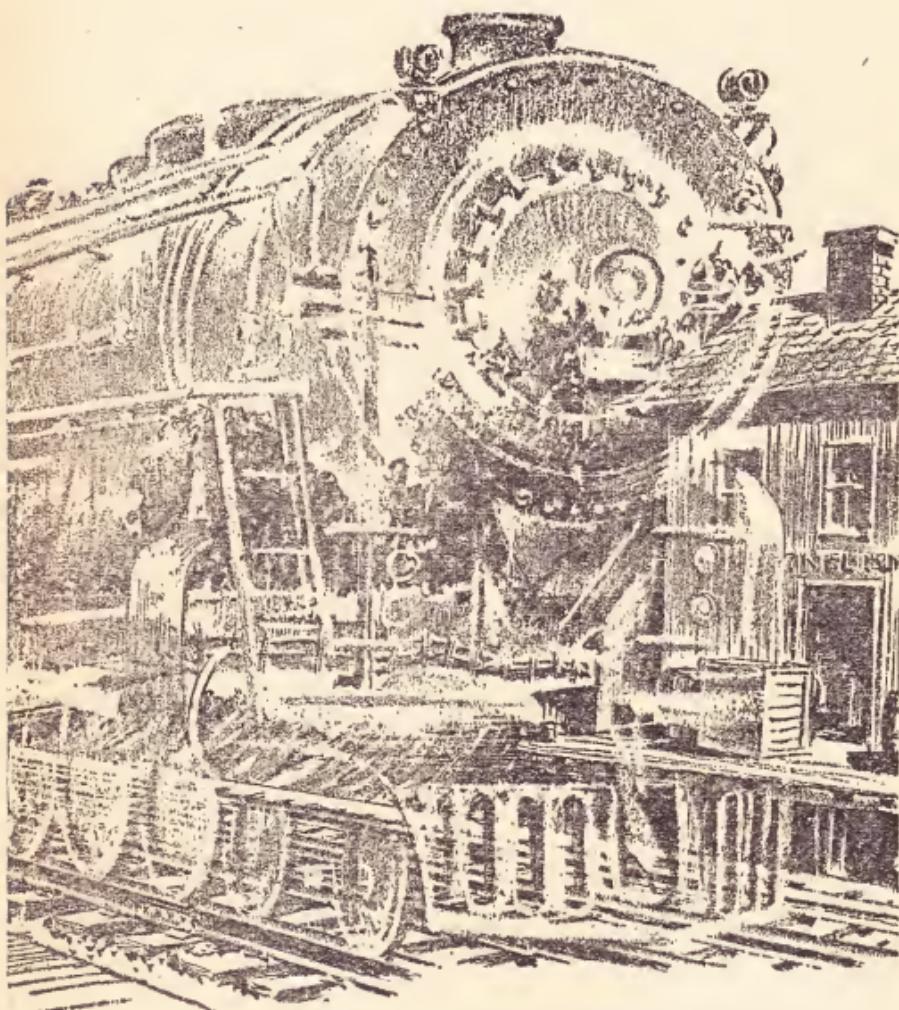
*By Gilbert Grant*



**M**IRRORED, was the kind of face you saw and forgot instantly. He smiled at the thought, and noticed with pleasure, that his smile was no more than that; it was neither grin, crooked, or likeable. Just a smile. He selected a tie to go with the neutral shade of tweed suit, then slipped a jacket over his

spare body. All his clothes were of various shades of grey, purchased deliberately for their lack of character.

Her voice came to him from the dinette-living room combination below, calling him to his breakfast. He answered, and though his thoughts were on things other than breakfast, long practice made his reply a blur



For a moment his mind was dazed. He had just turned away from the station ticket office and there, suddenly, was a waiting train...

of even-toned sound: "Be down in a second, dear."

He kissed her cheek as he had kissed it for the past two years, sniffed softly, nodded, as if in satisfaction, and said: "H'mm! Bacon does give me an appetite." He had also said the same words every morning of their two years together.

He ate with calm detachment, making neither work, nor pretense at manner of it. Then, having finished he laid the fork and knife on the plate and wiped his lips and waited for the electric coffee maker to finish its work. This was their two minute period of breakfast talk.

He was pleased, though not a sign of his pleasure was permitted to show. Two years with this dough-faced woman, and should he leave her this very morning, by nightfall she would not be able to remember a single feature, or even the sound of his voice. No, not even the memory of a gesture he was in the habit of using, would be hers. And suddenly he felt himself go pale.

She was smiling brightly, and saying: "That's funny, dear. But you look like you're excited about something. I mean inside."

He felt his breath catch, and willed himself not to show the tiny break the words had made in the armor he had built up for himself. His voice was moderate, tempered: "Excited? About what?"

"I'm sure I don't know," she replied. The brightness was only in her eyes now, as if of unshed tears, and her throat worked spasmodically, as she struggled to repress the cry in her heart. "I really don't know, dear," she said again. "I've never known you to be excited about anything. Not about a hat I bought, or a dress, or the way I rearranged the furniture, or even when I hurt or burn myself. Just fancy, I suppose."

He said nothing, only looked steadily at her with his grey eyes and waited for her to regain control. The click of the control on the coffee maker made her turn.

"Coffee's ready," she announced inanely.

"Yes, my dear. We are neither blind nor deaf."

She poured the brown brew, poured two teaspoons of sugar in his and added cream and handed the cup to him. He nodded his thanks and proceeded to drink it.

"Tell me, John," she said, as he looked at her over the rim of the cup. "Have you ever gotten excited or angry about anything?"

"My dear..." He laid the cup softly into the saucer. "What has come over you?"

She smiled and moved away from the table. "Nothing, dear. I guess I don't feel well."

He followed her example and started for the hall closet. "I do wish you would call the doctor when you don't feel well, instead of telling me it's nothing, then staying up all night, dosing yourself with patent medicines."

From out of the monotone of sound a single word made impression on her. "Doctor." She followed him into the living room. "Don't forget your appointment with the doctor, John."

"I have no appointment with the doctor. That was last week."

"He wanted you to return this afternoon. He wanted to talk to you about the cardiograph results."

"This is going to be a very full day. Call and ask him to make it another day."

She shrugged. "Very well, dear. Be home for dinner?"

"No. I think I'll be tied up quite late. Don't wait up for me." He kissed her dutifully and was gone.

HE CAUGHT a glimpse of the clock in the restaurant and stopped short for a second. Heavens! Was his watch wrong? Well, it was either three minutes slow, or the clock was the same number of minutes fast. In either case he had to run for the train. The next one due would make him hours late and for once he had to make a day exactly like all previous ones.

The station was a full block away and he started for it on a dead run. His breath was choking him by the time he got there and suddenly waves of blackness rolled over him in a sickening tide. He gasped as he leaned in the narrow embrasure of the doorway. There was a last terrible slice of pain across his chest and a last flood of darkness over his vision.

Sight returned but it was as if he were in a cloud-filled haze. He picked up the brief case he had dropped and staggered into the station. The haze persisted, as he moved toward the cashier's cage. It seemed to have been moved, or someone had painted it, but there was something unfamiliar about it. The whole station, in fact, had an unreal air, as if it too were part of the haze he was in. He fumbled for his ticket, then vaguely remembered it had been in another of his grey suits.

A stranger stood before him, materialized, as it were, out of the haze. John Dorn looked at the man, narrowed his eyes to see his face better, but found that the man's face seemed in montage, cobwebs of cloud shreds floating up constantly before it.

"I—I seem to have mislaid my ticket," Dorn mumbled.

"Here," the stranger said. A hand projected toward Dorn. "Your ticket. All ready for you. One way—"

"Thank you," Dorn said. He moved up the stairs to the platform and had

the pleasant feeling he was floating up the stairs. And too, the pain had left him.

The platform was deserted. He looked about and thought it strange that a fog had arisen so late in the morning. Only the darkness of the stairwell showed, like a hooded monster of evil. But now the train was pulling in. One car.

The door opened and he stepped in. The car was fairly crowded but he managed to find an empty seat at a window. The fog raced by and when Dorn turned he could see the mass of grey dust in which they moved was also behind them. The conductor was at the far end, moving toward him. Dorn continued to look about him.

His fellow passengers seemed so unreal today, as if they had become wooden. Now and then the train stopped to take on other passengers, all as wooden and empty-eyed as the rest, all as silent. So dream-like, Dorn thought. A sudden desire to close his eyes overwhelmed him. He put his head against the window and fell into a troubled slumber. A dreaming slumber—

He opened his eyes and shook his head. Someone said, "Hey. Randolph Street, fella."

Dorn looked up and saw it was a man he sometimes sat with. Already the aisle was crowded with commuters shoving to get off. He picked up his case and joined the line to the door.

THE STARTER before the bank of elevators nodded in greeting and the girl at the switchboard murmured her usual, "Good morning," and presently he was in the credit office. As usual, he was a minute or so ahead of the next arrival, time enough to open his brief case and make sure he had not forgotten anything. No. It lay snugly at rest at the bottom, its unwinking steel the color of slate with-

out reflection. He closed the grip again, put it carefully under his desk and started in on the correspondence.

The morning passed swiftly. Then, fifteen minutes before his lunch, which he took an hour earlier than the rest, his phone rang. It was Miss Nason, J. M. Harley's secretary. "Will you come to Mr. Harley's office, please?"

...Dorn was quick to notice that Harley was in an affable mood today.

"Aah! Dorn. Come in and sit down. Been wanting to have a talk with you. Found I've ten minutes to spare, or so my secretary informs me, and decided to call you in.

"I suppose you're curious, eh?"

"Yes, sir," Dorn let just the right amount of unease into his voice.

"Well don't sound so worried. I'm not going to fire you. To the contrary, I have in mind a promotion. However..."

Dorn saw then that Harley had an 'employee's card' on the desk before him. Harley looked down at the card, nodded curtly, and looked up again.

"...However," Harley reiterated, "I would like to ask you a question or two."

"Yes, sir."

"What is the future you plan for yourself with the company, Dorn?"

"I don't understand, sir."

"There's going to be a good job open soon, purchasing agent, and your office manager recommended you. Never late, never missed a day in six years, never tried to push yourself. I just wanted you to know you were being considered for the job, Dorn," Harley said.

The interview was over. Dorn found it hard to hide the smile as he walked from the office. He knew then, that he had succeeded in creating the character he wanted, and that it would pass any test.

DORN ALWAYS ate lunch at a cafeteria around the corner from where he worked. It was a large, barn-like place, full of chrome and white tile, like a hospital given over to food. There was a blonde girl sitting at his favorite table. She gave him a bored look and lowered her face toward the plate of macaroni and cheese she had before her. Dorn had also decided on that dish and with it, his usual coffee.

He looked at her over the rim of his cup. His voice was low and level: "You look very well today, Marie."

"Thanks. I don't know why. I feel like hell." She spoke with an odd bitterness.

"Marty...?"

She made a small sound of contempt. "Him? Nah. I give him the weepy-eye and he goes to pieces. He's like a big baby."

"Then what's the trouble?"

"This job you've planned. It's giving me the Willies."

He put the cup down and stared into it with absorbed interest. "I'll kill you if you break today, my dear." It was as if he had told her the time of day, so casual was the pitch of his voice.

Her eyes darkened in fear. "Yeah. You would, too. Marty I can handle, but not you. You're like a hunk of ice."

"Ice. A nice word. But let's not talk about us. This is Thursday, remember?"

"I've been trying to forget. I'm scared, I tell you."

He leaned back and smiled at her. "I used to smoke two packs of cigarettes a day," he said gravely. "Two packs. I gave them up two years ago because I didn't want anyone to remember that I did smoke. I could use a cigarette now, believe me. But you know I won't take one. Marie, my dear, I've lived two years just for

this day. How much will he be carrying?"

"Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in cash."

Dorn breathed deeply. A quarter of a million dollars in cash. It was worth the acting, worth the denials of the flesh, worth every day of the life he had dedicated himself to. A cool quarter of a million.

He had come to Chicago two years before and had taken a job with Harley and Company as a credit man. The window of their office overlooked the covered areaway between the two Mallory buildings. It was there he saw the messenger, with the tan cash case. He had watched the man carry the case from one building to the other, every day for two weeks, and gradually the great scheme was born.

He had chosen the woman he married, picked his friends carefully, people as neutral as himself, developed an anonymity that became *he*, and not a cloak to be worn. Soon, he would become another person. But first the money. That was the important thing, the money.

He studied her with a casual, disinterested air. Marie Winters. He had made her acquaintance a month after the scheme took root. She had been the one who watered the plant. For she worked in the cashier's department of Mallory and Company.

He thought back and realized, suddenly, how incredible his patience had been, how carefully he had planned, how much he had gone through. This girl, for instance. She had been a file clerk in the office. Step by step he had built her up, worked with her, smoothed the edges of her personality until she had worked herself to the job he wanted her to have, payroll clerk. A long time, but now it was going to pay.

"We can't miss, my dear," he said. "We've been over the setup step by

step until you and Marty are letter perfect. Now, for the last time, tell me what you and Marty have to do."

She sighed in resignation. "Okay. Marty parks the car on the Lower Level, just past Wabash. He waits till five minutes to four then walks over to the Washington side of Mallory's and starts through the arcade. At ten minutes to four I get a bad headache and get leave to go home..." She looked at Dorn, who was nodding gravely at her words. "Right?"

"Yes. Go on."

"At four o'clock exactly, the messenger starts across from the Wabash side to the State side of the building. Marty gets there, sticks the ice pick in him, grabs the bag and goes right on through. I'm in the cab waiting, and pick him up. We go down to the Lower Level and get rid of the cab and use Marty's car. You meet us at six at the flat."

"Very good."

"But what about the cops?"

"There is a change of shifts at four o'clock. The traffic man on Randolph always meets his Sergeant a couple of minutes before. I've explained that to you a dozen times. You should know by now that I don't take chances."

She seemed to be more like her normal self when he rose to take his leave. "Maybe," he said as he picked up his check, "I'm not ice at all. Maybe it's cold fire you see..."

WHILE ONE part followed the routine pattern of his work, the other part was lost in thought of what was to happen at four o'clock. The figure of Marty Minetti, like an image of shallow depth, stalked through Dorn's subconscious.

The one weak point, he thought. Marty Minetti. A lean, dark-skinned man, with a too-handsome face and a habit of talking through tight lips.

Marty thought he was a very tough lad. Marie had introduced the two; Marty had met her at a hot-spot on the near north side and had taken a fancy to her. She was blonde, loving, and dumb. Or so he thought. He in turn, led her to believe he was a rough operator.

Dorn had cautioned Marie against telling Marty how much money was involved. He had an idea that Marty's thought of big money was a hundred dollars. On the other hand, Dorn was aware of Marty's physical hold on the girl. He had beaten her once or twice, a practice Dorn had put a stop to. Marty didn't like taking orders. Somehow, Marie had convinced him he should. \*

Then, two days before, Marie met Dorn for lunch. She told him that Mallory's was going to pass out their semi-annual bonuses Thursday and that the messenger would be carrying a quarter of a million dollars cash in his bag.

That night Dorn and Marie had rented a flat on the north side. Marty came up later. They had gone over the plans for the last time and for the first time Dorn told Marty how much money was involved and how much he would get as his share. Marty regarded Dorn with a feeling of awe when the sum was mentioned.

"And here I thought it was just a heist f'r maybe a grand. Two hundred and fifty grand... I could live like a king, have a million dames."

But weak spot or not, Dorn felt secure that the very thoroughness of his plan precluded any miss, no matter how Marty felt. Only the most stupid of blunders could make him miss.

The very thought that a blunder was possible made Dorn's heart skip a beat. For basically, he knew Marie and Marty were both stupid, and

that no matter how well he had coached them, they were capable of errors in judgment.

He looked at his watch. Three o'clock. The minutes were dragging. He tried to concentrate on his work but found his mind wandering continually. Again he looked at his watch. Five minutes after. God! He was certain a half hour had gone by. Once more he bent to his work. But the names and figures were penned scrawlings on the paper and made no sense to him.

He looked at his watch again. Aah! That was more like it. Three-thirty. And now the minute hand was racing the hour hand. A quarter of, ten to, five to. Suddenly Dorn felt the flush of a fine sweat on his forehead. Try as he might, he could not help but go to the window which overlooked Wabash Avenue, and the arcade between buildings across the way. A last glance at his watch. One minute to.

His breath came short, spaced in jumpy gasps. A figure had appeared, as if propelled from the revolving doors of the Wabash Mallory's, and was walking casually to the State Street side. Dorn looked down Randolph, tried to spot Marie, couldn't, and brought his glance back to the messenger moving so carelessly on his way.

Marty appeared, a lean, swift-moving figure coming straight for the messenger. They came together in the entrance way, just short of the revolving door. Dorn couldn't see what Marty did but saw only what followed. Whatever Marty did took only a second. When Dorn saw him next he was carrying the tan, leather case, and was moving swiftly toward the cab which had suddenly pulled up at the entrance to the arcade.

They had turned the trick—

DORN FOUND that he was quivering as he started back to his desk. It took all his will power to control his nerves.

He went to the mens' room until he was sure he could control himself fully. Not that it seemed to matter. No one had noticed him leave, no one saw him come back; presently, it was time to go home.

The papers had three inch streamers. "Quarter million dollar holdup." Dorn noticed the heading of the story: "...Messenger killed by icepick wielding mystery man..."

He bought a paper and carried it along to the cafeteria where he read the reports of the robbery while he had his evening meal. There wasn't too much information given. The police seemed of the opinion that at least two had been involved in the robbery, and that it had been well-planned. They pointed out the fact that no one had seen the robbery take place, the arrival of the robbers, or their departure.

Dorn was well pleased. He had a full hour to kill before going to the flat. That too was part of their plan. No rush, no unguarded moments. Don't create suspicion in the minds of the neighbors by all coming in together.

Darkness was sweeping in from the West when Dorn signalled a cab into the curb. It was a long ride and it would be a long ride back. But he knew his wife would not be waiting for him. He had told her the night before he would be late. There would be no questions.

Dorn paused at the head of the stairs and slipped the grey gloves over his fingers. Then he paused before the door. He could hear the low sound of voices. His knock was as discreet as his manner.

The door opened and Marie's

blonde hair showed to one side. Marty was not to be seen. Her dark eyes narrowed in a pleased smile.

"John! We've been waiting."

He tossed his hat on the table and placed his brief case alongside the hat. "Where's Marty?"

She motioned toward the bedroom. "He's still counting the dough. Can't get over it."

Dorn smiled and followed the girl to the bedroom. Marty was seated on the bed close to the head. The whole spread was covered with greenbacks. The tan money case with the letters imprinted in gold, Mallory and Company, lay empty on the floor by the side of the bed.

"Hi, Dorn!" Marty's voice was tense with excitement. "Gees. Ever see so much scratch in your life?"

"Counted it yet?"

"Almost. Two hundred and ten grand, so far."

"I imagine the whole quarter million is there. I read the account of the robbery in the *Sun*. The cops are hot about it. The only thing that seems to be bothering them is they don't know where to start."

"Cops," Marty's grunt showed how he felt about them. "They don't know where up is."

"Don't play them for dopes, Marty," Marie cautioned.

"That's the way to talk," Dorn said. "Don't underestimate them, Marty. Always remember they have the organization. Now. How do the bills run?"

The girl answered: "Mostly small. Maybe ten thousand dollars in big stuff."

"We'll tear it up," Dorn said. "Twenties are the biggest bills we'll want to handle. Anything larger will be waving a red flag in our direction."

"You're crazy!" Marty broke in. "What the hell."

"Do you want the big bills, Marty?" Dorn asked quietly.

"Sure. Why toss ten grand out the window?"

"Because, Marty, they're harder to get rid of. And I don't want the cops ever to find out who pulled this."

"What's the matter, afraid I'd sing?"

DORN STEPPED forward and jabbed Marty with a stiff finger. "I didn't plan this all these years to have it muffed *after* we get the money. Don't play tough with me, Marty. You'd sing in high C if the cops ever got to you. We've got to be just as smart afterward as we were before. We'll get rid of the big bills. Right now."

"He's right, Marty," Marie said. "Just like he's always been. Those C notes are hot. They'll fry you in them."

"Okay. Okay! You twisted my arm. So we'll tear 'em up or burn 'em or whatever you want to do. Only let's stop talkin' about it."

"Burn them. In the bathroom," Dorn said.

Later, they gathered in the bedroom again. Dorn noticed that Marty had laid the money out in three piles. "All divided up?" he asked.

"To the buck. Split three ways."

"Fine. I'll get my case. But before we do our packing, are we clear on the breakup?"

Marty's voice was sharp with irritation: "Yeah, yeah. Do we have to go over it like a couple of kids?"

"No. I suppose not. Just so long as you have the money. Oh, well, worrying won't help. Very well. I'll get my case..."

He didn't miss the sudden sharp look Marty Minette gave his departing figure. Nor the signal he threw at Marie. The girl's eyes narrowed and a small smile came and went at the

corners of her mouth. Dorn saw Marty deftly palm the ice pick he had used on the messenger.

Dorn was bent over his case, his right hand digging at something inside. He turned his head in their direction as they came through the bedroom door. "Making room for the money," he said.

"Fine. Let me help," Marty said. He had to move around to Dorn's left as Dorn's hand came out of the bag. When Marty did see the gun, it was too late.

Dorn shot Marty in the belly, and as Marty fell forward against the table, Dorn shot him again, through the head. The gun made a muffled metallic sound.

He turned and saw Marie standing in the doorway and motioned her forward. "I said he was stupid from the start. The pick up his sleeve. Did he think I would fall for it?"

"How did you know?"

"Guessed it. What were you and he going to do, split my share between you? Did you think you'd last long with him? He'd have sold his mother."

"John, I don't like the way you talk. You don't believe we were together in this?"

He laughed softly. "Come here."

"Wha-what do you want?"

"To show you how cold fire will burn."

Her arms went around him and her lips were open and burning. He answered the wild pressure of her, thrusting his teeth hard against hers, caressing her with his free hand. "But I'm not Marty, eh, Marie?" he whispered against her mouth.

"Better. Better. He was soft."

"That's right. Soft, like you..." The gun made even less noise, pressed against her side.

She sighed softly and slid from his arms. She did not bleed as much as Marty had....

DORN TOOK a last look around. He made a mental check. The gun and its silencer were on the floor. The grey gloves were in his pocket; he could discard them later. He had made sure not to get any blood on his clothes. They looked asleep, except for the huge hole at the back of what had been Marty's head.

The greenbacks were almost too much for the brief case but he managed to get the last of them inside. The door was a final period to his association with Marie and Marty. And shortly, he would mark the end of another association, the one with his wife.

This time he did not take a cab. There was a carline a block off and he walked to it. Cab drivers sometimes remembered things. He wanted no one to remember him, in any way. The street-car was a long time in coming but he didn't mind. His mind played fancy free with all the things he was going to do during the long ride back to the Loop.

It was close to eleven when he got off the car, and shortly after when he got to the I. C. station. He remembered his schedule and knew there was a train due in a couple of minutes. He also remembered that he had left his ticket home. His hand reached for a bill in his jacket pocket and the fingers felt the pasteboard he had dropped into it. And memory returned of the stranger who had put it in his hands earlier that day.

He raced down the stairs and saw he was just in time. His train would be pulling in shortly. He did not join the line forming at the gates but stepped through an exit gate and trotted down the stairs. He knew the track this train came in on. Already he saw the headlight coming toward him. He patted the bulging brief case at his side with deep affection.

The door opened and he stepped

within. Ah. He hated crowds and now he could have a seat at a window. He fell into it with a sigh of satisfaction. And immediately felt the relaxing tiredness of approaching slumber. His eyes closed—

"Tickets, please."

Dorn looked up. The conductor was very close now. And Dorn's eyes narrowed. That was strange. This conductor was the same man he had seen on the train in the morning. For that matter—

He stared around him. The car was strangely filled now. And wooden faces stared sightlessly out the windows into a stygian darkness. Dorn felt a cold chill possess him and his hand flew to his heart apprehensively.

The chill became a cold wave of icy fear. He couldn't feel his heart. No beat—no heart beat at all!

"Your ticket, sir." The conductor was standing close beside him now. There was a smile on the man's face. A knowing smile.

"I—I don't feel well—my heart—"

The conductor's smile remained. "Of course, sir. But there's nothing to worry about. Your heart will never bother you again. Your ticket?"

He reached for the slip Dorn held in nerveless fingers. He nodded in satisfaction as he punched it. "Ah, yes. One Way." Then his eyes found Dorn's puzzled stare. "You're still confused. You've had something of a nightmare. Perhaps you dreamed of what your day might have been? Don't worry about that either. It's a quite common coincidence with death."

The conductor started to turn away. Words swept to Dorn's lips but remained unspoken. He wanted to tell the man he was crazy. What did he mean by insinuating he had died?

No heart beat at all...

"Last stop River Styx. Charon will make the proper connections on the

ferry." The conductor's voice faded down the aisle as he walked away.

And Dorn reached for the bag he had brought with him. The bag with

all the money—his hold on life...  
But there wasn't any.....

\* \* \*

THE END

## SORRY, NO URANIUM . . .

★ By SANDY MILLER ★

FOR USE in a simple Wilson Cloud Chamber for studying the paths of atomic particles, a small amount of radioactive material is required. Such a demonstration Wilson Cloud Chamber is common equipment around schools and is perfectly harmless. Anyone can build one and the device is essentially nothing more than a simple expansion chamber whose volume can be changed by squeezing a rubber bulb.

However, it is necessary to have some sort of radioactive material in order to show the natural disintegration of natural radioactivity. This means you must have a tiny speck of radium, or uranium or thorium in the form, of course, of compounds like radium bromide, uranium or thorium nitrate. But just try and buy some!

Flatly, you can't! No ifs and buts; you can't!

The materials are cheap. Uranium Nitrate is a mere dollar and a half an ounce

and only a ten thousandth of an ounce is required in order to provide all the "alpha particles" you could possibly want. But at the scientific supply houses, they say simply and calmly, "Sorry, the Atomic Energy Commission does not permit its sale to private citizens." That's all, brother.

The reasoning is good, we guess, but it's mighty hard on the would-be experimenter. Consequently being unable to obtain a radioactive material which before the war could be gotten in almost any quantities requires the use of some ingenuity on the experimenter's part.

We are now looking for the faces of an old wrist watch or two made during the twenties and the early thirties, whose luminous dial contains an insignificant amount of precious radium bromide. We'll latch on to some sort of radioactives, if we have to beat our way through a thousand watches!

★ ★ ★

## PINPOINTER . . .

★ By J. R. MARKS ★

IT'S GENERALLY conceded that one of the most accurate sciences of all is astronomy. With highly refined optical instruments, astronomers have measured closely the almost incalculable distances in inter-solar and inter-stellar space. Consider the distance from the Earth to the Sun. Richardson's *Astronomy* gives this distance as ninety-three million, five thousand miles, plus or minus, nine thousand miles! That's calling one's shots pretty closely.

Since optical work is just about as highly refined as it can get, it would appear that no further improvements in this accuracy can be expected. But while it's true of optical instruments there are now other ways to reach out into space. Primarily of course we're thinking of the radar contact that was made with the Moon. This primitive investigation, Man's first *actual* contact with a world outside our own, promises some interesting developments.

Radar men believe that eventually equipment powerful enough to contact Mars or Venus will be developed! This calls for a beam sent across twenty-six or thirty-five

million miles, which means a pulse transmitter of tremendous power. But that's in the cards for the future—definitely! Along with more powerful transmitters, methods of accurately timing the pulses are developing. Instead of an accuracy of about a thousand miles with which the Moon was pinpointed a few years ago, we can expect a possible accuracy of a mile or even a tenth of a mile! And brother, that's *real* pinpointing, considering the gigantic distances.

What good is it? An astronomer could answer that. He could use more accurate figures, but even more important, rocket men—and they're not a long way off—need the accuracy also. As far as inter-solar navigation goes, we've got good enough figures now, but every decimal helps. And scientific advances are so closely linked that it's risky to try and predict the consequences of something of this nature. Who knows? Knowing such distances accurately may in some subtle way influence a lot of things here on Earth. Time will tell...

# THE MOVING STRIP

★ By JOHN WESTON ★

CERTAIN aspects of our industrial civilization stand out like a sore thumb and point with perfect clarity to exactly how the future's going to be. Helicopters illustrate this and so do rockets and atomic power. But a more humble device does this even better. The device is called a belt-conveyor.

Now belt conveyors are nothing new. They've been used for a long, long time. But they've grown up. From the small flat belts you used to see connecting two flat pulleys together, belts have become huge strips of steel cable embedded in rubber, more than a thousand feet in length and as wide as ten feet! Around mining communities and construction projects these huge conveyor belts are to be found in increasing numbers. There is no comparable way in which to move large amounts of bulk materials like ores and dirt. In coal mines belt conveyors replace the miniature railroads. In factories belt conveyors are used everywhere from moving packages in the shipping room to carrying the objects on the assembly line.

Since it has become practicable to build conveyor belts of such huge sizes and re-

liability, the suggestion is that it be used to convey humans as the escalator belt does. The thought has often been treated in science fiction with stories of "belt or road cities" and similar extensions of this idea. It is not at all imaginative. For a belt road is capable of moving tremendous amounts of materials because it relies on the principle of "never-stopping" but keeping constantly in slow motion. Everyone is familiar with the crowd carrying abilities of an escalator in a department store, or subway.

Whatever the ultimate use of the conveyor built, industry is taking it over rapidly. On large works like building dams a conveyor belt may replace a thousand trucks and make the job infinitely easier, hauling everything from concrete to broken rock and removed or excavated dirt.

Often from such commonplace and prosaic developments like these we can get a sudden intimate glimpse into the future, seeing clearly for a moment what the world will look like not far hence. We predict for one thing, it's going to be well filled with conveyor belt systems!

★ ★ ★

# AUTOMATION IS HERE!

★ By CHARLES RECOUR ★

GET A LOAD of that word "automation!" At last science and industry is taking its cue from science-fiction. This is a case of "we told you so." In many books and magazines and in the industrial plants themselves, men have seized on or coined several new words to describe the quiet revolution that is taking place in their plants. "Automation," and "automatized" are two new words you'll hear a lot of before long.

Both refer to the fact that more and more incredible machines are being installed in large factories each day. Both refer to the fact that many processes are completely automatic requiring the interference of absolutely no one during the whole cycle of their manufacture. Small metal parts are made by the millions by simply feeding in material at one end of these automatic machines and taking out the produced part at the opposite end. That is "automation". A part is "automatized" when it has gone through such a cycle.

We've harped about this and practically blown our stack trying to show what it

means for the future, but it is impossible for us to really convey the tremendous sense of accomplishment that these developments bring. Actually what "automation" means, is that we are well on our way to relieving Man of all the hateful, onerous chores that have ever been his lot. All the tedious time-consuming boring, enervating, exhausting, distasteful types of work are on their way out—not right now—but on their way. For machinery is the hope and salvation of the future. Man can't help but progress in spite of himself.

Getting back to the point we started with, when industrialists and factory production men go so far as to extend their imaginations to include the voluntary use of such an extravagant word—automation—we can almost suspect the Millenium is here. Extreme conservatives that they are, they don't recognize that they are the ultimate radicals and it is they, not the politicians who are going to be accountable for future developments.

The robot age isn't here—not just yet—but we're a long way along the road toward it...

# READER'S PAGE

## BEST LETTER AWARD IS ON!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Everybody's imitating Thorne Smith! The issue before last it was Charles Myers with THE SHADES OF TOFFEE, and now Bob Bloch has come up with THE DEVIL WITH YOU! The Bloch story was very funny in spots, and interesting throughout. The style was Smithish almost all through, and the setting very similar to that writer's uproarious RAIN IN THE DOORWAY. This story, you may remember, is about a perfectly normal fellow who is impulsively taken in as a partner by three rather off-center individuals who have won a department store in a poker game. The guy falls in love with the head of the pornographic book department, who shows him the ropes (and not only in the matter of pornographic books). This story, too, culminates in a fire, but instead of striking oil, the partners cash in on the insurance (which is about the same thing in the eyes of many people).

But please don't feel that I'm condemning Bloch, Myers, or anyone else for imitating Smith's style of writing. Smith is gone and it would be a shameful thing if no one continued the marvellous way of writing he originated.

If I was a mean kind of person, I could ask how Bill could have made money out of an oil well on land he held no interest in, but I'm not, so I won't.

The novel was very good. 'Nuff said.

I note an improvement in the shorter stories with this issue. Before the Great Metamorphosis, your short stories were somewhat better than the novels. The improvement in F.A.'s quality, however, seems to have influenced mainly your novels. The novels have greatly improved in quality, while the shorts have remained more or less stationary. But Peter Phillips' WELL, I'LL BE HEXED! was slightly terrific, and WINDOW TO THE PAST by Chester Geier not far behind. I am glad to see that Geier has returned to his former high standard of material.

The artwork picked up, too. Thank you, thank you, thank you for getting Finlay back. Sharp, as always, is excellent, and Mac did a good cover. But this sort of cover is good only for variety. Don't make it a practice. Mac's inside illos were also very good. (Is that a fannish rumble of "Bok! Cartier!" I hear?)

Rog Phillips recently remarked in THE CLUB HOUSE that the reprint mags will be weeded out by a process of selection. I, personally, feel that they will not be able

to withstand the competition of the new story magazines, but I wish them all good luck. Donald Algeier forgets that FFM is the only reprint magazine which has been going steadily for any length of time, and it and FN have the rights to the material printed in Argosy, All-Story, etc., and these are not examples of the s-f and fantasy prevalent in the field. The standard reprint mags have a combined output of five issues per year, and only have seen three, so no conclusion may be drawn from them. All in all, science-fantasy is better now than ever before, and there's no reason to flood the market with inferior reprint magazines.

I never thought you would seriously consider my suggestion for awarding originals to the best letter-writers. The winners could be picked by reader's votes, so that you wouldn't receive a flood of sugared letters every month (which would happen if the editor did the choosing), thereby eliminating your chances of getting a cross-section of the readers' viewpoints. I hope more fans have written you on this subject since my last letter.

Scientifantastically,

Morton D. Paley  
1455 Townsend Ave.  
New York 52, N.Y.  
June 23, 1950

We're glad to know that you enjoyed the Bloch story so much, Mort. As to Geier, he's working on a terrific cover story right now. You'll be seeing it in a few issues. Incidentally, as we write this, Chet is anxiously pacing the hospital corridors. He's going to be a father again—number three. .... As to the letter voting award, we're in favor of it. So let's see some votes starting with this issue. The letter getting the most votes for this month will receive an original interior illo. How's that?

Ed.

## KIDS, HE SAYS!

Dear Sirs:

As long as kids are joining the letter writers, I wonder if I will do? I am 14. Science Fiction is my favorite type of reading material. F.A. is an excellent fantasy magazine (fantasy, being second in my estimation), and I enjoy it very much. But, once in a while, couldn't you slip in a real science fiction story?

Werewolves and vampires are fine for short stories, but please, no novels of them!

Bobby Pope has the right idea about FLIRGLEFLIP. Wow, what they won't think of next!

Now to the August issue. THE DEVIL WITH YOU is an excellent novel and the writing style reminds me of Thorne Smith. Is there a new TOFFEE story coming up? I hope so. (Just thought I'd slip that in).

The other two were poorly done and rather dull anyway.

David Travis  
Box 1011  
Clovis, New Mexico

*We may have some interesting news on a new "Toffee" story pretty soon, Dave. Watch for it.....Ed.*

### THE DEVIL WITH IT!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I noted with interest that in the August "Readers Page", a reprint war is raging. Mind if I give a few of my undoubtedly worthless opinions on the subject? 1. Mr. Allgeier remarks that modern stf is no more than juvenile adventure. I admit that quite a bit of it is, but on the whole, I believe the opposite to be true. I have had at least half a dozen yarns shoved on me in book and magazine form of publishers and editors whose deluge of superlatives and wild statements about "old classics" is Niagra-like. Yet, every one of these stories has proven to be a lot of saccharine nonsense. Their style of writing seems to be aimed at the "Alice in Wonderland" crowd.

I do not claim that all the old "classics" are as bad as that, but it seems to be true of the vast majority of them. On the contrary, a scant few of those old science-fiction yarns are far better than anything contemporary magazines have to offer. Notable examples of this are the "Adam Link" yarns of E. & O. Binder, and I doubt if anyone alive today can write better than H. G. Wells!

Mr. Allgeier cites the case of "Fantastic Mysteries" to prove his claim that reprint magazines can survive. I agree with him, but he neglects to point out that the backbone of these magazines is straight fantasy, even though they occasionally print science-fiction. Back around the twenties and thirties stf was just a squalling infant, as far as magazine writing was concerned. But straight fantasy was in its prime, with such unbeatable authors as Howard, England, Lovecraft and Merritt. Thus the fantasy reprint magazines have a tremendous amount of *genuine* classics to draw on. But science-fiction reprinters would have nothing to offer but the pathetically hackneyed adventures of a host of Buck Rogerish heroes, scourges of the spaceways, and world-saving scientists after the incredibly few real stf classics were exhausted.

The old yarns of stf are dead and buried. Let's allow them to rest in peace—for Ghu's sake, no reprints!

Morton D. Paley's suggestion about originals is a stroke of genius. It would make an excellent policy, providing you keep Finlay and McCauley around.

As usual, I have a complaint: if an author wishes to write an amusing story, must he rely on puns like, "Al Gonquin," "Mol Hare," and "L. Drith?" And, must he use sequences like the events in the wax museum, which have the atmosphere of Grade B motion picture comedies? Bloch can write a fairly readable story in a serious vein, but I could not manage to get even half-way through his latest monstrosity, THE DEVIL WITH YOU!

McCauley wins the grand prize (a pair of fur-lined cufflinks and a set of rubber-soled skis) for his masterpiece on this month's cover, and isn't it about time for a James B. Settles? And what happened to St. John (J. Allen, that is)? Why not get Leigh Brackett to do a yarn for FA?

Yours truly,

Brian McNaughton  
198 Bergen Place  
Red Bank, N.J.

*J. Allen St. John will have some illos coming up shortly. As to letting a writer do a yarn for us, we have an open market—we buy from all comers, if the story is good.....Ed.*

### FINALLY MADE THE GRADE!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Could it be possible for a lady to squeeze in a few paragraphs on your Reader's page? Maybe Mr. McNaughton, Beck, Ganley, or Silverberg would forgive you if you printed my letter and omitted one of theirs this month. I can't understand why some readers have their letters printed almost monthly, while others can write in over and over and never see them in print. Don't you receive enough letters from other readers? One would almost think the above mentioned were on your payroll they appear with such regularity. I have written 10 letters in the last 12 years and the only one printed was when I omitted the Mrs. signing only my initials and last name. Do you think women are illiterate, or can't you read my writing? (That's possible I admit.) Anyway here's hoping this letter will change my luck.

Your July issue had some very good short stories in it, and I enjoyed very much, YOU'RE ALL ALONE. Hope I Never Wake Up; it made me stop and think.

Here are some of my favorite current authors and some of their best stories. As you will see, I like a fast moving, interesting story.

With two small boys interrupting 12 times every half hour, it taxes my tired brain too much to concentrate on some of the heavy stuff usually printed in A. S. Howard Browne comes first I believe with stories that end before I know they're half-way through. Yes, they are that in-

teresting and exciting. Next I think Don Wilcox comes close to making every story a good one. Favorites are: WHISPERING GORILLA, ROBOT PERIL, DWELLERS OF THE DEEP, CRAIG'S BOOK, and PRINCESS OF THE SEA. Others are Livingston, DIMENSIONS UNLIMITED, Peckie, TOKA SERIES, Sherman, THIS WAY TO HEAVEN, Chandlers, FORGOTTEN WORLDS, Hamilton, DAUGHTER OF THOR, Geier, FOREVER IS TOO LONG, Hamling, SHADOW OF THE SPHINX, and Phillips, HIGH EARS.

The old stand bys and favorites, some who are gone now, are first of all, E. R. Burroughs who had a style often copied, but never equalled. Also, Frank Patton, DOORWAYS TO HELL, Williams, JONGER, O'Brien, FLOATING ROBOT AND FURLOUGH FROM ETERNITY, Bond, WHEN FREEMEN SHALL STAND, Pollard, STRANGE MISSION OF ARTHUR PENDRAN, Gifford, THE LIQUID MAN, McGivern and Leroy Yerxa. I think Richard Casey writes about the best spellbinding short stories. I haven't included any 1950 stories as I haven't read them all yet.

R. G. Jones is a wonderful cover artist but, no one could paint women like McCauley. Jones girls are all so, shall we say buxom? One center of attraction I mean. And that usually, stringy hair-do, is strictly from hunger. If they don't have permanents, can't they at least have wavy hair once in a while? He does use beautiful coloring though. The Mac girls were so beautiful you didn't notice one thing at a time about her, but saw her as a complete woman. Not just a large mouth, oversized bust, or scantily clad body, but a complete woman.

Jones' best covers, in my estimation, were for WITCH OF THE ANDES and SEA PEOPLE. McCauley's were, GODDESS OF THE GOLDEN FLAME, and THE SWORD AND THE POOL. Mr. Naylor had a beautiful cover for QUEEN OF THE PANTHER WORLD, and Mr. Kohn for MERMAID OF MARACOT DEEP.

Whatever happened to the Magarians? I used to enjoy looking at their beautiful illustrations and fairy-like scenes. Sure would like to see them back again. One of the first things that got me interested in FA when I was 16 was the illustrations by Fuqua in the large old sized mags. I liked to color them until I started reading them and gave up the colors.

Last but not least, I would like to get in touch with fans in Southern California, especially Long or Compton. Object? Trading, buying and selling old issues of sf and fantasy. Anyone interested?

Well, Mr. Hamling, if you print this letter and answer half of my questions you will be doing a good job. Apologies to Messrs. Ganley, Beck, McNaughton and Silverberg.

Mrs. Betty Faulkner  
2205 West 19th St.  
Long Beach 10, Calif.

*We'll make room for a lady anyday, Betty. And seriously, the only reason a lot of letters never see print is that we just aren't able to publish them all. There's no monopoly on the Reader's Page by any one fan. Some appear more frequently than others, true, but we don't try and play favorites. The Magarians aren't illustrating any longer. And you'll see more of McCauley's work in coming issues. And oh yes, welcome into the fold!.....Ed.*

OUCH, MR. BLYLER!

Sirs:

I used to consider those fans who began their letters, "I have been reading sf for millions of years, and have never written a letter, but such and such moved me...." a little trite, if not actually stupid. I have, however, seen the light, and I hereby place myself in the same category.

I refer to a letter appearing in your June issue signed, "J. Blyler Esq." Well, we must give the man credit for signing his name to the thing. I have always read your magazines with considerable interest, although my interest in the letter columns has always been somewhat passive. But never in the "quite a few" years that I have been reading sf (I always think of that as an abbreviation of "stuff" for some reason), have I come across an example of such colossal conceit backed by so little apparent foundation as Mr. Blyleresque's letter.

Surely he could be nice enough to venture his opinions in a somewhat more tentative manner. After all, though he apparently thinks it impossible, some of us may not see things the way he does. He dares to comment upon the youth of fans whose letters, incidentally, I enjoyed more than his, in a superior manner. He seemingly considers himself far enough above them mentally to "excuse or overlook" their views on the basis of age. How can a mind this narrow grasp the wider concepts of fiction based to a degree upon the unproven?

And you, Sirs, did not even rally to the defense of your young fans. Rather you chose to overlook this gross insult. It would perhaps interest Mr. Blyleresque to know that I, too, am only a teen-ager, although I may claim the distinction of approaching 20 as of November of this year. How old, may I ask, is this peculiarly intolerant male? His views are at once infantile and senile, I wonder can he be real? Or is he a man from Mars?

Surely if these kids are interested in sf and can discuss it intelligently, their fresh viewpoint should be welcomed along with the more mature outlook of those (this includes me tee-hee) who are over thirteen, the age at which he apparently draws his line of...shall we call it prejudice?

But enough of him. I have already given him more comment than he deserves. He was right in saying that many more talented opinions of your various stories will appear in other letters, and here I will follow his example and keep my comments,

with the exception of one, to myself in lieu of the better appraisals your other readers will make. The exception? I don't approve of Toffee in novel length. She seemed to me to lose a great deal of her sparkle with all those other "characters" surrounding her. I really believe I like her better in shorts. (Need I call that a pun?)

And now I leave you, probably to your relief, and certainly to mine. This has been quite a long time in the writing. I only hope that if this sees print, your typesetter knows more about spelling, etc., than I do. Oh yes, I'm supposed to say I like your magazine, I guess. But that's silly. I wouldn't be reading it after all these years if I didn't.

Phyllis Poore  
General Delivery  
McFarland, Calif.

*We don't have to take a stand on these matters, Phyllis. That's what the Reader's Page is for—and you handle your case well enough.....* Ed.

#### WEIRD, PIRATES, AND BEAMS!

Dear Ed:

"You're All Alone" was the best story in the July issue. They were all good; "Author Unknown" would have been better if it had been longer. How many times has "Survival" been used as a title for a sf story?

The only gripe I have with FA is the illustrations. You need Finlay or Bok. I think Finlay did some of his best work for FA and AS—for stories like "The Devil's Pigs" and "The Star Shepherd". Robert Gibson Jones can do covers but not interiors. Next to Lawrence, I think Bob Jones is the best cover artist in the business. I'll never forget the covers for "Prinches of the Sea" and Lair of the Grimalkin".

Mrs. Mary Bitters has a good idea—why not a mag with just supernatural stories? WEIRD TALES is the only mag of this type on the stands today, and even WT lets an occasional sf yard creep in. It's my opinion that another magazine devoted entirely to supernatural stories would sell.

Let's have more Hasse and McDowell. Get them to work on some honest-to-goodness thud and blunder space opera—some thing about the good 'ole days when the space lanes abounded with pirates and the planets abounded with beams.

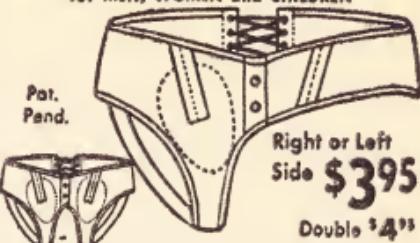
I'd like to hear from other fans—especially teen-agers. I promise that all letters will be answered.

Nancy Moore  
R.R. 2, Box 153  
Sharonville, Ohio

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O.k., one more vote for the weird type fantasy. As to Hasse and McDowell, we're sitting here ready to read anything they send in.....Ed.

### WHAT IS THIS GUY?

Dear Ed:

You've got some pretty good stories in your last issue (July '50). I've decided "You're All Alone" takes first place, with "End of Your Rope" coming in for a close second. Third is "Survival" because of its queer ending; fourth, "The Reluctant Genii", fifth, "The Ice Cream Tree", sixth, "The Broken Doll", and seventh "Author Unknown".

I've read FA for exactly one year and I believe I can safely say that the best story I've read in FA yet is "The Involuntary Immortals" by Rog Phillips, my favorite author. Let's have more of his stories.

I like the novels best, so keep putting one in each issue and I'll be satisfied. "Shades of Toffee" in the June issue, though it was sinister enough, was really more of a comedy than fantasy. I'd like to sit in the Shades of Toffee and there's no shadow of a doubt as to what I'd do.

In conclusion, I want to ask Brian McNaughton what's so horrible about cracking your knuckles. I do it all the time, and it never bothers me in the least. (Wish I could say the same for my victims.)

That isn't all I crack though. I crack and pop my wrists, the upper joints of my fingers, my thumbs, and my left elbow (crack, crack).

And Ed, if you want help (in cracking yours, maybe), just call on me.

Donald Smith  
Box 71  
Hot Springs, South Dakota

Thanks for the offer, but no thanks...Ed.

### AN OUT OF THIS WORLD STORY!

Dear Ed:

First off, let me say 'tis a long time since I've written to FA or AS. I can say that I was one of those privileged to read the first issue of FA. Boy! That sure seems a long time ago. I was just a kid out of high school at that time. Even then I knew that FA and AS were the best in their lines. I think that there were a few years that for some reason the mags went down in reading value, but I am glad to say that of late they are back up on top once more. Although I cannot call myself an expert on science fiction, I have been an avid reader of same for these many years.

My real reason for this communication, is to do a little raving in public about the lead story in this month's issue; namely, "You're All Alone" by Fritz Leiber. It's wonderful! MAGNIFICENT! DIVINE! In fact, there are not enough descriptive words in the language to describe my opinion of it.

First, it deals with personal lives and feelings, which make a story for me. Second, it is a stride in the right direction in getting away from the old style that so closely resembled the theme of most "westerns" where the boy finally kisses the girl, when all is finished. Keep up the trend. Thirdly, although it is pure fantasy, it had a certain ring of truth that made me stop and consider things I've seen happen.

All I can say for Leiber is let's see more and more of his writings. There are many titles from late issues that I could remark on, but I want to leave some space for others on these pages. So, I will just mention one that especially struck my fancy. That was Sturgeon's "Dreaming Jewels". EXCELLENT, but not to be compared with "You're All Alone". So just keep up the good work, Ed, and I will be going all out and renewing a subscription that I had way back in '39. Covers have been good, too, and keep up the idea of putting a few pics in the lead novel. I like that.

Only thing I'm wondering about is if I'm alive and you are just one of the machine robots; because if that be the case, this letter is out of the "Pattern" and will never see the "Reader's Page."

Ed Robinson  
Box 527  
Lexington, Nebraska

We're glad you liked the Leiber novel so well, Ed. As far as we've been able to determine it will prove to be one of the top stories of this or any other year. And you better renew that subscription if you want to be sure to get every issue of FA—and believe us, with the yarns we have coming up, you can't afford to miss one! ...Your letter saw print, so guess we're one of the "live" ones...we hope!....Ed.

### A MODERN CLASSIC

Dear Bill:

(Should've warned you there'd be letters like these!)

Guess maybe that last letter to FA was a bit late, but this is being dispatched right on the day I bought and read the mag. And editor, reading the thing on the very day I buy it is something that I just don't do any more, not even STARTLING or ASTOUNDING.

As for writing a letter to the editor,

well, you must know yourself now that I just haven't been able to get up ambition to do it.

But when I read Fritz Leiber's magnificent lead novel, "You're All Alone", I just couldn't stay away from the typewriter. Sir, that is without doubt the best novel that has graced FA's pages for, alas too long a period. I congratulate you heartily! More of this, please, more; maybe even a sequel! Everything was right. Maybe it was only my mood, the fact that I was waiting for this kind of story, the fact that my favorite feminine name is "Jane", and various and sundry other minor things that aided it...but the story hit me harder than any scientific twaddle or cheap fantasy that I've read for many many months. In fact, I am just unable to express fully the emotion within me right now. Leiber is truly a master, as I knew when I first read a story of his, "The Man Who Never Grew Young", and this is his greatest triumph. Who is Brackett, who is Bradbury, who is Kuttner? I predict that this issue of FA will make the greatest splash on the muddy sea of fantasy in years; further, I predict that the story will make hard covers within four years.

This story has something I can't put into words. I think I can tell what part of it is. It's what every story should have. It has one hero, one heroine. I put myself into the body of the hero, I thought his thoughts, I lived his frustrations, I felt like tearing the room apart when he came up against the stone wall of Jane's silence and the inexplicable puzzle of the four men with the black hats. I waited with him in the little alcove while the three villains played cat and mouse, I hoped the hope of the knowing doomed as he clutched the ancient firearm. The joy that was his coursed through my veins like fire as it must have enveloped him.

Do you know what I mean? I hope so; I think so. Certainly I feel myself lucky to have ever read such a story as this. I know, as I said, that several minor things combined at the moment to give it this mighty stature in my mind; probably a majority of your readers won't agree with me. But what do I care for the other readers? For once I was the author's perfect subject; I felt what the author wanted me to feel. And I'm glad, sir, mighty glad.

If Leiber ever writes a sequel to it, and the sequel doesn't equal this story, please Mr. Hamling, please, please tear it up into little pieces and toss it into the infinite wastebasket! This is the kind of story for which I search the promags and the fanmags and the non-fantasy library books and all kinds of literature. It's the kind of story I hope to write someday myself, that shadowy will-o'-the-wisp perfect story that every author dreams of

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attaining someday. With the reading of "You're All Alone" I have justified all the time and money I have ever devoted to buying s-f; and in the faint hope of someday, sometime, somewhere reading another such story, I shall continue my search.

All the short stories are magnificent. "The Reluctant Genii", "Survival", and "End of Your Rope" were the type which always appears in the Ziff-Davis s-f publications, although egregious examples of that type I shall admit. The others?... well, I read the shorts first, and had intended to praise them to high heaven, but now I've read the lead story, and have already spent almost two pages doing that...so I'll merely say they were short-short versions of the lead story. "The Broken Doll" was a wonderous little gem, which some people probably won't agree with, poor devils. "The Ice Cream Tree" was practically nothing—and another classic. "Author Unknown", however, was the type of short I've been trying to write for years. And so true! And, shame on me, I didn't even guess the ending. Wonderful! Supreme! Gad, this whole issue is good. It just goes to prove that I was right in my faith in Ziff-Davis. I said I'd buy AS and FA till doomsday, and in doing so I have to give up others such as OTHER WORLDS and AMFM, but with such issues as this I shall be repaid!

#### READER'S PAGE:

Allen May—When an object's speed approaches 1-speed, the mass approaches infinity, not zero. But observation proves that internal stresses would cause the moon to break up into little pieces, as must have occurred in aeons past with Saturn to form Satty's rings.

C.T. Beck—Don't you know that Frank Bahl is Rog Phillips?

Ed Cox—Nobody said anything about plagiarism, just plot similarity and the plain impossibility of the plot.

Brain, whoops, Brian McNaughton—As I said in my personal missive, you win, FA is FA. But that was a Shaver story, whether it emanated from Shaver directly or not (somebody dare me to explain that), and it was handled as if to give the impression that the author "believed" it to be true.

A. Roberts—Right, more novels.

Bob Silverberg—Hey, if any fan calls you a neophyte, that only goes to prove one thing; namely that that very fan is

himself either a neophyte or else sadly misinformed about current fans. Gad, even I knew about you in spite of no letters in the columns through your fanzine reviews; and I hope Merwin gives you an A-rating soon. But I didn't like the moon-bouncing story, sorry to say, either one of them. Just opinion I guess. Hey! Don't the people around where you live know anything about SPACESHIP? I addressed a letter to you, c/o SPACESHIP, with the address but no name, but it came back. Had a dime in it, too, but never got up the ambition to send it to you again. That was in the days before I was publishing my own fanzine, a nice little number 15c, 6/65c, bi-monthly, about 20 pages, mimeographed, fiction from fans, and the best fiction at that.

Henrietta McGee—The line of demarcation between fantasy and s-f is so slender and vague that nobody can say for sure that any story is s-f or fantasy, because while to him it may be one, to someone else with different standards it will be the other. I guess we get no sequel to "The Man From Yesterday", though.

Mrs. Mary Bitters—Not weird stories, please! Well! Maybe a few in and around, and—say, I've got an idea. Hey, there, editor, how about a Ziff-Davis version of UNKNOWN WORLDS? Why not give it a thought?

Paul Glen Wright—Don't you know that Paul Lohrman is Shaver? I was sure about it when I saw the similarity in style, and my suspicions have since been confirmed. Wonder if ye edde will cut that out? Really, I like Lohrman much better than Shaver, especially his short stories.

Frank Smith—Yeah.

Dave Hammond—Yeah. No. I don't think so. No. Right.

Editor—You discovered Roger Phillips? Hey, let's hear more of this. How old is Rog, where'd you discover him, etcetera, etcetera?

Enough!

W. Paul Ganley  
119 Ward Road  
North Tonawanda  
New York

*There isn't much we can add to the terrific praise Leiber's novel has already received. But when you mention a new version of the old "Unknown", what else is the Leiber story? And we'll give you more stories in this category as time goes on.*

*Rog Phillips? He sold his first yarn to Ziff-Davis some four years ago. Maybe five. He's been a top favorite ever since. He may sell other markets—and brother is that boy busy—but he always keeps his best stories for you know who! — us.....* Ed.

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## OCEANIC DEPTHS

★ By A. MORRIS ★

IN SPITE of the fact that most of the high-powered ultra-ultra gadgets of science are used in military applications, there still seems to be room for peacetime pursuits too. A decade or two ago, the world was thrilled by the pioneer exploits of the scientists who searched the atmosphere in lofty balloons and who plumb the ocean depths in steel spheres. These romantic, and at the same time useful, exploits, are very rarely engaged in nowadays in a world preoccupied with its destruction in one form or another.

But here and there, among earthquake researchers, among seamen and among aviators, you find a hardy spirit still infused with the desire for the chase, the romance of hunting facts down to the ends of the Earth. Recently—during the Second World War, that is—a Navy officer, the commander of a submarine still found time to pursue, out of academic interest, an interesting fact. In light of all the developments in aviation we tend to forget that some time in the future a lot of history may be made by men in the sea. In any event, this scientist-soldier used the sonar and ultra-sonic sounding device of his submarine to locate what is believed to be the greatest depth in the Pacific Ocean. It is located in a spot north of the Phillipines and is a tremendous depression in the sea bottom, about six and a half miles below the ocean's surface! The hole which is in the form of a crevice with sloping walls, so far as the sonar devices could determine, is unquestionably the deepest spot on Earth. Near the Japanese coast a similar depression exists but it is only the second deepest one—thirty-four thousand feet!

It is a pretty safe bet that in the future a good deal of food will come from the sea in the form of both fish and plants. Oceanographers are therefore anxious to do a great deal more exploratory work for surprisingly little is known. Knowledge of the sea-bottoms, holes in them, sea vegetation, currents, temperatures and so on, enable scientists to help determine weather conditions.

The use of sonic devices in deep sea fishing is increasing among people all over the world, for at last men have a tool with which they may probe into the murky depths and locate and isolate their objectives.

From these facts, it can be seen that oceanographic research is not a waste of time or energy, nor is it purely romantic. Perhaps such esoteric questions as the cause of the Earth's magnetism may lie there—and not in probing the heavens... who can tell?

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# TRITONIAN TERROR

★ By JUNE LURIE ★

YOU CAN roast or freeze, as you please, on the frigid Neptunian satellite of Triton. Tim Blake adjusted the thermostat slightly and shivered. Twenty-five kilometers beneath the lonely Pulse Station the heat pumps dragged more energy to the dome. Outside the bitter methane winds whipped coldly against the metallic structure, their sound a keen, high-pitched whine that never ended.

Tim looked at the bleak white orb that was the planet Neptune, three hundred and fifty thousand kilometers away and shuddered again. God, he thought, I'm getting punchy. Six months here has a man talking to himself and hoarding nuts. No wonder they figure six months is enough. Well, with relief due in two weeks, I guess I can stand it. He grinned when he thought of the time he'd have back in Losang.

He went over to the pulser and checked its multitudinous gauges and meters. One hundred times a second, ceaselessly it spat a twenty-five thousand Kilowatt peaked pulse into space in a tight two degree beam. This served as a convenient marker for the Martian-Jovian run and made automatic control of a ship simple. Quickly Tim went through the standard check-up, including a test survey of the two stand-by transmitters. The beam must not go out! And it wouldn't unless the dome were practically destroyed.

Suddenly a green pip flashed on a scope, and the buzzer sounded. Tim jumped to the panel. What the devil! Relief couldn't be this early and no craft would have any reason for landing. Triton was simply a marker beacon.

The receiver tripped and the loudspeaker shivered into crisp tones.

"Conant II, freighter Venus calling dome... Emergency landing... meteoric damage... request O.K. . . ."

Tim shook his head. This was strange. Entirely too strange. But he couldn't refuse succor.

"Pulse Dome IV okaying... Come in... stay clear of Dome..."

The receiver abruptly quieted and Tim watched through the glassite. In two minutes he saw the rotund bulk of the ship coming in, all rockets spitting flame. And as carefully as he looked there seemed to be no evidence of damage. A curious feeling of alarm overtook him. This was fishy—but good! He climbed the metal steps to the Dome top and seated himself in the Beam-turret. He didn't move or revolve the heat-beam projector. He didn't want to give away his awareness. This might be legitimate and it might not.

The ship came down with no trouble at all. The rockets died and airlock door swung open. Two space-suited figures emerged. They were unarmed as far as

Tim could see. He watched them carefully. They moved against the blasting winds toward the Dome lock. Tim squinted straining to analyze them. Then it came to him. They seemed to waver slightly, as if they were just bordering on the translucent. The stronger Tim tried to fix them in his sight the more they seemed to shimmer.

Then he realized the illusion. He knew what they were. Physically they were two-foot gobules of cell masses and they were sitting right inside the ship! Those suits were moving across the ground only in Tim's mind! This wasn't the first time Mercurian Thinkers had tried to seize a Dome.

I'll cook their hash, Tim thought. Grimly he swung the barrel of the Beamer around and touched the firing trigger. The suits vanished in a flare of light. And at the same instant Tim felt as if something was freezing him into position. Tele-hypnosis was standard Thinker tactics. Forcing every motor nerve of his body into motion, Tim brought the Beamer to bear on the freighter—undoubtedly taken in space somewhere on the Venusian run. Slowly the weapon veered around. Tim fought the intense pressure of powerful thought. The Thinkers tried to suppress his consciousness, but it was too late.

Tim played the Beamer over the freighter literally cutting it into chunks as easily as a butter knife goes through butter. The semi-immobile Thinkers jerked into frantic effort as they dodged the Beamer but they couldn't move fast enough. Unerringly Tim swept them with his beam.

The pressure snapped off. The overwhelming sense of mental power disappeared and Tim knew he'd nailed them. He leaned back in the Beam turret and sighed with relief. That was narrow!

Headquarters would do some more Thinker hunting when they found out about this. Mercurians daring to attack a Pulse Station. This work wasn't quite as boring as he'd thought...

## OUT OF THE DARKNESS

★ By LEE OWENS ★

OF ALL THE ills that flesh is heir to, none is more terrifying to contemplate than the shadowland of perpetual darkness...and the blind are courageous beyond belief in facing this devastating problem. But they do not make their way through the blackness alone. Science, marshalling all its forces, is endeavoring to alleviate the agonies of this greatest of all personal disasters.

And characteristically, scientists have attacked the problem with incredible boldness. In this day of cybernetics it is not strange to hear of the link between Man and Machine, but ordinarily the link is rather thin and tenuous. Dr. Cooper, a physicist and authority on the problems of the blind has pointed out how-

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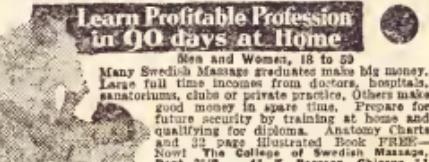
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ever, the boldness of some of these attacks on blindness. Medical men and biophysicists have even investigated the possibility of giving blind persons a crude form of sight by tapping directly into the optic nerve with suitable electronic instruments! Fantastic as this seems, it has been studied, but unfortunately, it appears that at least for a long while, not much will come of the studies, primarily because it has been learned that the optic nerve degenerates rapidly once the original stimuli from the eye are gone.

Cooper, in surveying the field of blindness, asks the all-important question; what is the major problem of the blind? It is essentially this: a blind person differs from a seeing one only in that he lacks information about his environment. With the eyes gone, none of the other senses even approach remotely the reliability and quantity of data that they are capable of feeding to the brain. Necessarily then, any attempt to aid the blind resolves itself into a study of methods of supplying a blind man with information about his surroundings so that he may move and walk and travel with something approaching his former facility.

The first instrument of aid, is the Seeing-Eye dog. We can call him an "instrument" because basically he does just what his name implies, "seeing". But this use of the dog is impractical on a large scale. Of the fifty thousand or more blind in the United States, fewer than two thousand use Seeing-Eye dogs, primarily because the link between man and animal is one of such delicacy that the relationship cannot easily be acquired.

The study of this problem then involves providing the blind man with surroundings-information through the aid of the electronic miracles of super-sonics, radar, and photo-cells. A number of prominent research organizations have undertaken to work on this matter, strongly influenced by the recent war. Their success has been moderate, not because they have not devised instrumentation, but because they do not yet know how to relate the man and the machine. Welding a miniature sonar device which sends out sound waves and picks the bounced-off reflections up, amplifies them and gives them to the user of the gadget through sound or tactile sense, is a problem not to be dismissed. It, in fact, is the core of the trouble.

Dozens of ingenious machines like these have been produced and tested. With some blind persons they work well. With others, they do not. As a consequence of this study, this semi-failure of technology to provide the answer, the field is being reviewed. As it stands now, it appears that the future will see developments along the standard lines, that is, miniature sonic devices which enable a blind person to survey his surroundings, to graph and chart them with sound waves, and eventually after practice, to interpret these intelligences.

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